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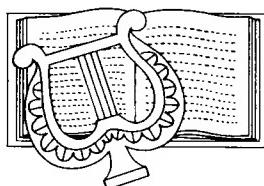
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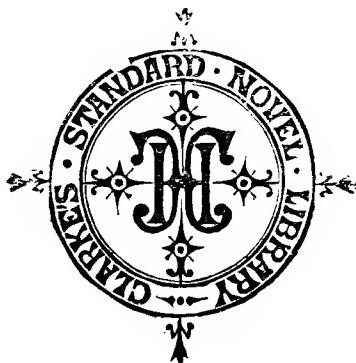
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AGNES WILLOUGHBY

A Tale of Female Life and Adventure.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

ANONYMA—SKITTLES—ANNIE—LEFT HER HOME—THE SOILED DOVE—
THE LADY DETECTIVE—THE BEAUTIFUL DEMON—DELILAH—
SKITTLES IN PARIS—LOVE FROLICS OF A YOUNG SCAMP—
KATE HAMILTON—INCOGNITA—FORMOSA.



LONDON: CHARLES HENRY CLARKE,
7 GOUGH SQUARE, FLEET STREET.

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AGNES WILLOUGHBY.

CHAPTER I.

A HEROINE CUT AND DRIED.

IT is a question whether it is not better to have your heroine ready to your hand, cut and dried, instead of being obliged to trace her progress from the chrysalis state to that of the full-grown, full-fledged butterfly, rioting amidst the summer flowers in all the glory of Nature's brilliant paint and sparkling gold-dust. Agnes Willoughby was a lady of accommodating morals. She was as fickle as she was beautiful. She was a tall well-made woman ; her great point was her wealth of rich golden hair, which was unquestionably very lovely ; you could not gaze upon it without being fascinated and wishing to make the acquaintance of the possessor of the charming tresses, in looking at which the eye never tired and the imagination was never satiated. Her complexion was not quite so perfect as it should have been ; but a woman cannot possess every attractive quality, or she would be little short of an angel upon earth, which is an anomaly, and conse-

quently an impossibility. Agnes was five-and-twenty—a dangerous age. Her beauty had not reached its climax, perhaps, but it was not far off attaining that enviable period. She was well known about town and much talked of in certain circles, but society knew her not, and the Queen's Drawing-rooms were ignorant of her beauteous presence. In a country where the aristocracy are the most lovely and accomplished women in the world, this was hardly a circumstance to occasion much ground for regret. Indeed a cynic would be inclined to say that she was not missed. Agnes, however, was amply compensated for this ostracism from the feminine portion of polite society by the acquaintance of the male, and to her, much more attractive part. She lived in a small but handsomely-furnished house, in the neighbourhood of Finchley Road. One fine afternoon, between the hours of two and three, in the commencement of summer, a tiny brougham was waiting outside the door of the house in question, and Agnes was engaged in dressing herself apparently for a drive. Throwing aside angelic scruples, let us rush in where angels would have feared to tread. A lady's bedroom is a sacred apartment, and ought to be held in as much veneration as the seraglio of a Turk, or the mysteries of the Temple, which were shrouded from the vulgar gaze by the veil. But to the novelist nothing is hidden. Agnes was standing before a large glass surveying the effect of a white shawl over a dark blue dress. Satisfied with her scrutiny she proceeded to pull on a pair of lavender gloves, sewn with black,

They fitted her to perfection, and the thin kid showed the outline of the wedding-ring and keeper, which was to delude those unacquainted with the actual facts of her history into the belief that she was married. She made this little concession to the prejudices of society at an early age; and although no event had as yet happened to justify her adoption of the symbols of the wedded state, she lived in hope that the day was not far distant when she would stand a veiled and blushing bride at the altar of some Puseyite church in Pimlico, for her religious faith—which had, for some time past, to her great and infinite regret, been under a bushel—was in accordance with that of the new and fashionable sect which has adopted the tenets of the Oxford Schismatic. Taking up a pretty sunshade, she pulled up her dress a little behind and before, drawing and twisting her neck as she did so to see if her crinoline sat as it ought. Being satisfied upon this important point, she went to her toilet-table and smoothed her face over with a powder puff, drew her veil down, and descended the stairs. A servant waiting in the hall opened the door. She passed out and let herself into the brougham, telling the driver to go to a certain number in Piccadilly. The man touched the well-worn brim of his hat with a reverence peculiar to coachmen, and drove quickly away. Agnes did not carry a card-case. She looked upon such a thing, except on certain occasions, as a superfluity. If she called upon any of her friends, she did so with the honest and straightforward purpose of seeing them. She knew

that they would not deny themselves if they were actually at home, and she generally timed her visits so that she would be able to catch them. On the present occasion her journey seemed to be one more of business than of pleasure, for she leant back upon the luxurious cushions of the exquisite equipage, and moved her diminutive and well-made feet up and down in an impatient way, such as excitable and nervous people delight and find great relief in when they have anything of a tiresome or unpleasant nature to go through. As the brougham turned down Park Lane she gazed wistfully toward the Park and its crowd of carriages and equestrians, as if she would have much preferred being amongst them. The brougham stopped before a small unpretending looking house in a good part of Piccadilly. A rattling knock at the door after a slight delay brought a servant in answer to the noisy summons. He ran forward and let Agnes out of her carriage, telling her in reply to her question that his master was in and waiting to see her. "Shall the brougham wait, miss?" asked the servant, assuming a respectful attitude. The answer was in the affirmative, and without waiting for the servant to precede and announce her, Agnes tripped up the well-carpeted stairs, and unceremoniously entered a handsome apartment in which a man was pacing uneasily up and down before the windows. Hearing the door open he turned round and gazed at the new-comer. When he recognised his visitor he walked rapidly to meet her, and shaking her hand with warmth, said, "I am glad you have come. I expected you earlier."

"I could not come before," she replied. "I was up so late last night at Mott's that I felt as tired as a dog this morning when I woke up. I should not have been here now if it had not been for your sake. No other man in London could have brought me out of my den till it was time to go to Cremorne —not one, I can tell you."

The man smiled, and exclaimed, "I know how to appreciate your purely disinterested generosity, and I intend to show my gratitude by giving you something to drink. What will you have?"

"I'll have some seltzer and hock," replied Agnes. "But you need not talk a lot of humbug about my being disinterested and all that, when you know just as well as I do that we only stick to one another for our mutual advantage. I hate chaff from you. It has no effect upon me. Doesn't impress me in the least. So you mustn't try it on."

This man's name was Charles Dicks, not an elegant or a sounding patronymic, but it answered his purpose in the absence of a better. He was thin and cadaverous, with a profusion of curly hair. Tall and dressed in a fashionable manner, he knew how to wear his things, and he had a decent appearance. You might not have taken him for a gentleman, but you could not have put him down for a blackguard. What his occupation was, how he got a living, and how he came to reside in a house in Piccadilly, will be subsequently related. Going to a sideboard, Charley Dicks, as he was called amongst his intimates and associates, brought out some seltzer water and a bottle of hock.

"Shall I brew for you?" he asked.

"Well, I should think so," said Agnes; "you don't think. I am going to take my gloves off and make my hands dirty, and draw a lot of corks and all that, just to save you a little trouble. I hate to see men so beastly lazy!"

Charley Dicks smiled again; he had a peculiar knack of smiling when he was bullied. He seldom resented an insult or a slight as most men do by force of arms or by lingual violence; but he had his own way of revenging himself upon his enemies. If he discounted a bill for a man who afterwards treated him coldly in some public place, soon a demand for the immediate payment of the money would come from some unknown quarter. The debtor would drive at once to Dicks', and demand the meaning of the proceeding. Charley would smile in his usual satisfied manner, express his great regret at his inability to do anything in the matter, the bill had passed out of his hands in the way of business; he was well aware that the present holder was a hard man who would seldom listen to a compromise. Indeed his character was so well known that it would be only a waste of time and breath to urge him to do so. The only way was to pay the money. The next appeal on the part of the discomfited debtor would be for a further loan in order to meet the bill in question. Charley, with his imperturbable gravity, would express greater regret than ever, and declare, with a solemnity that defied incredulity, that he had lost several thousand pounds that morning, and was absolutely

without funds, with the exception of a few pounds for his primary and personal expenses.

He mixed the foaming beverage for Agnes Willoughby, and handed it to her. The young lady seemed to derive considerable benefit from the absorption of the draught, and taking the empty glass from her hands and placing it on the table, Charley exclaimed, "Of course you don't know why I sent for you this morning?"

"How should I?" asked Agnes.

"Well, how should you? I don't see how you could, without you are a clairvoyant. Perhaps you number that accomplishment amongst your many others."

Alice played angrily with her sunshade, and said, "There is one accomplishment I have!"

"What is that?" demanded Charley Dicks.

"Only this. I very often hook it off without a moment's warning when people worry me, and then if they want to see me they have to come after me, and take the chance of finding me too."

"But, my dear Miss Willoughby, you couldn't do that with me."

"Couldn't I?" she exclaimed; "I should like to know what's to stop me."

"Oh, a variety of things which it is scarcely worth while discussing; they must be patent to you, if you will only take the trouble to think for a little time."

"I can't think of any," replied Agnes; "so you had better tell me what you mean. I know I'm mixed up with you in a variety of ways, but that's

no reason at all why I should be tyrannized over by you."

"How cruel you are!" replied Charley. "You know I do not deserve the harsh language you make use of. You have often said I am the best fellow in the world ; and did I not mix that seltzer and hock for you in the most accomplished manner ?"

"Go on with what you have to say to me," said Agnes, "and don't smile like that ; you know I hate that detestable smile of yours. It is just what I should imagine that of a cynical mute at a miser's funeral to be like."

Assuming a serious expression of countenance in obedience to the mandate of his fair but rather imperious visitor, Charley said in a slow and impressive tone which was one of his characteristics, "A new card has turned up, and it is decidedly a trumper to any one who can lay hold of and secure it."

"Why don't you talk plain English ?" said Agnes. "I suppose some new fellow has just come into a pot of tin, and wants somebody to help him spend it ; or else it's some old buffer come back from India with plenty of the needful and no constitution, a small amount of liver, and a devil of a temper. Isn't that about the size of it ?"

"You are not far off," replied Charley ; "but you have not hit it exactly. It is a boy who has just left Eton. He is a good-looking fellow, but peculiar in his manner."

"A boy ! That is a good deal better than an old man. If you had proposed an old man to me as

rich as Croesus, I would have cried off. I had enough of Blagrove Richardson, as you know as well as anybody. No, thank you, no more old men for me! What's your new man's name?"

"Horace St. John Warner," answered Charley Dicks, complacently. "Mrs. St. John Warner would not sound badly, eh?"

"It will do," said Agnes. "It might have been better and it might have been worse. Now let us hear all about Horace Warner. Have you a *carte* of him?"

"Precisely what I went to Maull and Polyblank's for an hour ago. It occurred to me with my usual foresight and prescience that you would demand something of the sort, and I ascertained that he had been photographed at Maull's. Here it is; what do you think of him?"

Agnes took the proffered card, and looked carefully at the features portrayed upon the sun-sketch. It was the face of a well-built handsome young man, rather stout, of the average height, a moustache on his lip. Very dark hair, parted in the middle, gave him a slightly effeminate appearance, which, taking him altogether, was far from displeasing. His was the sort of face which was not detracted from by what would have made most men look insufferably mild. The photographer had very happily caught the dominant expression of Horace Warner's face. It was one of restlessness, closely allied to irritability and impatience.

"Well," said Mr. Dicks, "do you like him?"

His tone was rather anxious than otherwise.

"I can't say that I dislike his portrait," replied Agnes; "he is not a bad-looking fellow. Of course he is only a boy at present."

"He will be twenty-one in six months."

"Well, that is what I call young. What sort of a way has he?"

"Rather rough and uncouth I am afraid you will say. But you must regard him as a young cub who has to be licked into shape. You have good materials; you are a clever modeller. The result ought to be a perfect thing in clay. He is well connected; he will have plenty of money in a short time, and he can raise what he wants now. At five-and-twenty he will inherit a vast quantity of property; and he has an extraordinary passion for golden hair."

"Then you think I shall just do for him, eh? Is that why you picked me out?"

"That is one reason. Another is, that you are one of the few women in London that one can confide a thing of this importance to with any chance of success."

"You are determined to flatter me, Charley," said Agnes, laughing; "but you may rely upon my working the thing as well as I can, if I undertake it. When shall I see this paragon of juvenile perfection?"

"He will be here to-morrow night. Will you come?"

"Evening dress, I suppose?"

"Yes, I think you will look better—it shows your hair. By the way, I bought you something

which is very popular in Paris just now. All the women are using it. It is a sort of pulverized gold. The dust is very fine, and if sprinkled in the hair gives it, I am told, a charming appearance."

As he spoke he took a little ivory-inlaid box from his pocket and gave it to Agnes, who thanked him, and said she would try the effect of it when she got home.

"There are many things about Warner," said Dicks, "which you may possibly dislike very much; if so, don't slang me, and say that I deceived you. If you like to put up with a few disadvantages, you can by so doing secure what ninety-nine women out of a hundred would be only too glad of. But I shall leave it entirely to your discretion. You shall see him and judge for yourself; only, I repeat, he's a big fish and worth catching. Once caught, you can twist him round your finger as you would a tress of your pretty hair. Where are you going now?"

"I shall take a turn in the Park, I think; I have my brougham at the door. Can I give you a lift?"

"Well, no—thanks," replied Mr. Dicks; "I think 'twould be better for us not to be seen too much together."

"All right. I shall come here then to-morrow night about nine o'clock."

"Very well; don't forget to come early."

Agnes picked up her sunshade and was soon in her brougham again, which rolled along in the direction of the Park. She employed herself in

thinking over Mr. Dicks' proposition. She knew him to be a clever man—she felt perfectly sure that he would not have suggested the enterprise to her if he had not been certain of her achieving a success which would amply remunerate them both for any trouble and outlay they might be put to. As her carriage mingled with the gay and fashionable throng on the banks of the Serpentine, ambitious thoughts swelled her bosom, and she thought that it would be only judicious on her part to endeavour to raise herself in the social scale if the opportunity offered. Agnes had arrived at an age at which women become practical—throw aside the follies of their youth, and begin to lay the stones of an edifice which may shield them in their declining years when the voice of flattery is stilled and that of love no longer whispers softly in the entranced and listening ear.

CHAPTER II.

THE BLUE JONESES.

THE crush of carriages was so great in the Park that every now and then a block took place, which allowed those who were on foot to lean over the railings and converse with those of their friends who happened to be in the temporarily inextricable position we have alluded to. Agnes sat well forward in her brougham, and was noticed by a polite bow on several occasions. Two men who were walking along arm-in-arm stopped short at Agnes's carriage, and, lifting their hats simultaneously, bent forward and spoke to her. They were rather remarkable men to look at; both were stout, commonplace looking men—but they were dressed in blue; their coats were made of blue cloth—their cravats were blue; and altogether their appearance was undeniably striking. Agnes could not for a moment recollect where she had seen them; but it was evident that they knew her, for one of them exclaimed, with a lisp—

“ Ah, little woman! how d’ye do? Taking an airing in the Park? Say the Prince of Wales is out somewhere!”

“ I suppose he has come expressly to see you,” replied Agnes.

“ Only inducement I know of. Perhaps there

may be another ; but I'm not acquainted with all the mysteries of Marlborough House."

" You seem to know me, old fellow !" exclaimed Agnes. " Where have I met you ?"

" Met me ?" repeated the blue man ; " why, met me at Charley Dicks's place, in Piccadilly. That's where."

" Oh ! now I know," cried Agnes ; " you're the Bluc Joneses."

" That's my name. Everybody knows Billy Jones. That's my brother Harry. Nobody knows him—he's a duffer."

" I dare say he's as good as you are," replied Agnes.

" Don't doubt that for a moment," replied Billy Jones ; " but, fact is, we're both—both of us duffers. Can't help it, you know—'spose we were born duffers. Been duffers all our lives, y' may say."

" What are you going to do to-night ?" asked Harry Jones, in a polite tone, of Agnes.

" What's that to do with you ?" replied Agnes.

" Well, a good deal ! for as I heard you were going to dine with the heir-apparent, I thought I'd ask you to take me with you," said Harry, quietly.

" 'Nother of the mysteries of Marlborough House," ejaculated his brother ; " Jove, sir, it's an awful place, that."

" Certainly not," answered Agnes. " If I tried it would be no good. They wouldn't have such a fellow as you."

" I'd change my coat for them," he said, good-humouredly. " Wouldn't that do ?"

"Well, I think a black Jones would be a little better than a blue Jones. But then it's the name. If you would stick De on to the Jones it wouldn't be so bad ; but Jones alone is shocking. Why don't you call yourself Augustenberg St. Jones, or Boulevard des Capucines de Jones ? I shouldn't mind taking you then."

"Wouldn't you ?" he exclaimed ; "I'll do it then—pon my Sam I'll do it. But, I say, where are you going really ? If you haven't anything particular on hand—such as an important engagement with a prince of the blood royal, or if you are not expecting a visit from a Japanese ambassador—why, I was going to ask you to come to a little party at our place."

"Where do you live ?" demanded Agnes.

"Sackville Street."

"Near the Burlington ?"

"Yes, that's the crib," replied Harry Jones.

"Who are you going to have there ?" said Agnes.

"Only a few jolly gorillas from the Gaboon. They're come over in their own yacht, and don't intend to stop over to-morrow. If you know any nice little women—like yourself, for instance—you can bring them with you. If you come, don't be later than ten."

Before Agnes had time to reply the carriage in front moved on, and she was separated from her friends the Blue Joneses, who, after again raising their hats, walked on in a contrary direction. She had often heard of the two brothers, but at first she did not remember having met them at Mr. Dicks's

house in Piccadilly. They were reported to be diamond-merchants, very well off; but if you spoke of them to anybody the only answer you got was a shrug of the shoulders and some response like the following :—“They may be a very good sort. I don’t know much about them; but if I were you I shouldn’t cultivate their society too closely. Better keep your eyes open.”

Agnes, however, did not think there would be any harm in accepting this invitation. Her friend Dicks appeared to know them, as they spoke of him as Charley Dicks, and had been at his house. This was proof presumptive of their being somewhat intimate with him, and Agnes thought that if there was anything objectionable about them Mr. Dicks would not have encouraged their visits. After turning the matter over in her mind she resolved to go, and was busily engaged in thinking who she could get to accompany her when the line of carriages again came to a standstill. They had not been in that position more than half-a-minute before three young men, with one of whom she was acquainted, passed. Recognising Agnes, her friend at once advanced to speak to her—

“I wanted to see you,” he said; “I have been cutting about everywhere.”

“What for? You don’t generally take such an interest in me, do you?” asked Agnes, looking up at him with her lustrous eyes.

“I do just now,” he replied; “because I saw you talking to those two men fellows call the Blue Joneses.”

"Well, what of it?" said Agnes.

"Why, you see, they are not exactly the sort of men for a woman to know. Did they ask you to come to a quiet party at their little place?"

"Yes, they did."

"Hang me, if I didn't think so. It's their game. I wonder you didn't know them. I should have thought that they would have been at you before now."

"Look here," exclaimed Agnes; "leave your friends, and jump into the brougham. You can tell me all about it while we go round the Park; say you will meet them just about here in half an hour."

"With pleasure," replied the young man, whose name was Graham, and who held the dignified rank of Lieutenant in the — Rifles.

Lieutenant Graham spoke a word or two to his friends, and stooping underneath the railings, got into the road and took his place in the brougham by the side of Agnes, who said—

"It's quite an age since you and I had a confidential chat. I've got lots to say to you. But first of all, pitch me that tale you promised about the Blue Joneses. What will they do to a poor little bird like me if I venture within their domain?"

"Well, I'll tell you," replied Graham; "they are great beasts, at least so fellows say; and the chaff against them is, that if they get a woman into their place, they will get drunk themselves and try and make her drunk too; then they will stick her up on the mantelpiece or somewhere, and pelt her with cocoa nuts; nice amusement, isn't it? I once heard

of their being paid something like five hundred pounds by a swell artist to get him, only for a few hours, a well-known woman about town for a model. He wanted her to do what the Duchess of Ferrara did for Titian. He had asked her to sit for him over and over again, but she always refused. So he applied to the Blue Joneses, and they got her. She made a great row, of course ; but the picture he was painting happened to be something about Andromeda, and as this woman made a devil of a shindy they chained her up to a wall, just as Andromeda was in the fable, and the artist, I believe, did a very good picture, which was in the Academy last year."

" How dreadful !" exclaimed Agnes ; " why they ought to have been transported. I never heard anything so horrible in my life. People say we live to learn, and I think we do, for I have learnt something from you, and for which I cannot be sufficiently grateful. I think, though, the beggars would have bad luck if they tried that sort of game on with me ; and as for sticking me up on the mantelpiece or on a bracket, and pelting me with cocoa nuts—why, they might do it if they could ; but before they did it they would have their work cut out for them. It would take them all they knew."

" Well, yes, I think it would," replied Graham ; " but I considered it only friendly to tell you what I knew about them. I saw them talking to you. I should have come up at the time, only I didn't see exactly how it was to be done while they were there."

"Do you know how I should like to serve such beasts?" said Agnes.

"No; tell me. I should like to know awfully," replied the Lieutenant.

"I should get two or three men to put on a woman's crinoline and a dress—and go there. Most probably they would try some of their games on, and then they would get what a woman could not give them—a thorough good hiding. What do you think?"

"It is not half a bad idea," replied Graham. "I think it might be done. Did either of the Joneses ask you to bring anybody with you?"

"Yes, Harry Jones did," replied Agnes.

"In that case you might take some one with you, and everything would happen just as you propose. I wonder if those two fellows who were with me when I met you would do it?"

"Who are they?" Agnes inquired.

"Both men in the same regiment as myself. We are at Aldershot now. Our leave only lasts a day or two more. So if we are to do anything out of the common to talk about when we get back we ought to begin at once. Suppose we arrange to disguise ourselves, who will be the costumier on the occasion?"

"I have plenty of dresses and things at home that you can make use of if you don't mind."

"Only too proud for my part," replied Graham, with a smile of pleasure.

"Oh, I have just thought of something," exclaimed Agnes. "Were you at Eton?"

"I think most of the men in the — Rifles were," he replied.

"I'll tell you why I ask. Did you know a man of the name of Warner, St. John Warner?"

"Oh, yes! Well, he's not much of a fellow, though. I remember his breaking his arm, and having lodgings up town, opposite the Christopher. I used to think him as mad as a hatter; but he may have improved since that."

"Oh," ejaculated Agnes. She had elicited the information she required, and began to think that in spite of Mr. Dicks's assurance, there was something very rotten in the state of Denmark.

Lieutenant Graham suddenly pulled the check-string. The driver pulled up, and the two men who had been chatting carelessly while awaiting the arrival of the brougham were discovered.

"Let me get out and walk a little way," Agnes said.

Graham declared that he should be delighted, and handed her out.

Agnes turned to the coachman and said, "Drive on, and wait at the corner of the Row near Grosvenor Place."

Graham introduced his friends Mr. Scott and Mr. Vigors, and the little party walked leisurely along the banks of the Serpentine. As they were going along, Graham mentioned incidentally the plan Agnes had suggested as the best for punishing the Blue Joneses. Scott and Vigors expressed themselves very strongly on the matter, and declared they would like nothing better than to chas-

tise such cowardly ruffians, who, under the guise of friendship, decoyed women unable to help themselves into their house and then maltreated them.

"I should like to see those Blue Jones fellows when they find out that they have caught a cross between an Amazon and a thorough-bred Tartar," and he laughed at the idea his fancy had conjured up.

Many men who cannot sketch a lamp-post are great at making mental pictures, which are sometimes exquisitely beautiful, at others ludicrously funny.

Some objection was raised at first about putting on women's clothes : but when they came to talk the matter over, it was clear that the affair could never in any way be made public. It would only circulate as an anecdote amongst their friends and acquaintances, even if it got about at all.

"You see," Lieutenant Graham observed, "the Joneses, for their own sake, would not make a thing of that sort known, and if they did it would be no great matter. Every one would say it served them right. All we shall have to do will be to assume the character for a short time. We will go late, say about eleven or twelve, and they will most likely go to work at once. We shall punch their heads and exit by the first door."

"But I say," interrupted Vigors, "what about our moustaches, and all that."

"Oh, I have some thick Maltese veils at home; you can wear them," replied Agnes. "You can say you have a cold or something, and would rather not take your bonnets off. In the gaslight they won't

notice it. I'll get you up all right. You must look upon me as the Nathan for the occasion."

The three men regarded it as rather a good joke than otherwise. Graham proposed that they should dine together somewhere. "Pity," he said, "there's no Burlington at this time of the year, or we could amuse ourselves there. Suppose we go to Fitzmaurice and borrow his drag, or ask him to tool us down to Greenwich? He would, like a shot."

"We could get back to Mrs. Willoughby's house in time to dress," said Vigors. "If you fellows like to wait somewhere I will run round to Fitzmaurice's and bring the drag up."

After some consultation it was arranged that Vigors should go and fetch the drag, and that the others should walk on along Piccadilly and wait for him at an hotel where they were well known, and where they could solace themselves with a cup of cunning manufacture, such as Badminton, or some other skilful mixture of those various essences which make glad the heart of man. Agnes, who was of an adventurous disposition, was pleased beyond measure at her fortunate meeting with Graham. "Why," she said to herself, "I never in my life went to the Park in the season without meeting some one I knew." The drag arrived in time, the owner having kindly lent it to his friends, and the ribbons were handed over to Vigors as being the best driver of the three. In going along Piccadilly Vigors had picked up two men he knew, so that they had quite a small party.

Agnes liked drags excessively. "There is something in a drag," she was fond of saying, "which licks every other sort of trap. It costs a lot of money, and requires some driving, so that it licks cads altogether. You rarely see a man who is not a gentleman driving a drag."

They went over Westminster Bridge, along the Old Kent Road, through Deptford, and at last were landed close by the paradise of pensioners.

CHAPTER III.

THREE STRANGE WOMEN.

AFTER spending a very pleasant evening at Greenwich, the party returned to town, and arrived at Agnes Willoughby's house near the Finchley Road before ten o'clock. Agnes brought out some wine for her guests, and left them engaged in smoking downstairs while she went to her wardrobe and inspected its contents. Selecting three dresses and some other necessary articles of wearing apparel, she laid them on the bed and went into the drawing-room, and sent Graham up to dress himself. "Jump into the things you like best," she exclaimed; "put them on as well as you can, and then come down to me. I'll put the finishing touches to you. You must fancy me your military servant at the camp."

"It would require a great stretch of imagination to do that," replied Graham, "for my man down there is the ugliest beggar I ever met with."

"And you mean to say I am not. Now go along; I wont have you wasting your time in paying me compliments."

Seeing he was under orders, Graham took up the candle and went upstairs. He put on a crinoline, a dress, and the body, and on looking at himself, fancied he was not a very bad imitation

after all. Parting his hair in the middle, he cosmetiqued it well and smoothed it behind his ears under his bonnet. Then he tied the veil under his chin, and joined his friends. They saluted him with a roar of laughter, which, however, soon subsided, for they remembered that they would soon appear just as ridiculous. Agnes corrected Graham's way of attiring himself in several important particulars, and expressed her opinion upon his get up. "I think you'll do," she said, eyeing him critically. "That veil hides the hair on your face capitally, and no one would find it out except he went to kiss you; and I suppose, if any one attempted to take that liberty with you, you know how to let out right and left."

"Don't be alarmed about that," replied Graham.

"But the worst of you fellows is," remarked Agnes, "that you are all so infernally tall. You won't look like ordinary women; you'll look more like giraffes than anything in creation that I can compare you to."

"You must fancy us the Three Graces just imported from Patagonia," observed Vigors.

"You go upstairs and get ready," replied Agnes; "you are the tallest of the lot. I think we ought to take an inch or two off you."

"All right," said Graham; "I suppose you have a chopping-machine in your kitchen. I'll hold him if you'll do the amputating part of the business."

"You will want Corporal Sutton for that," put in Mr. Scott. "He's the man, you know, who cuts sheep in half."

In the midst of this conversation Vigors made his escape, and going through the same process as Graham, soon returned, fully equipped.

"Tell you what's a bore," exclaimed Mr. Scott.

"Not yourself, I hope?" said Agnes.

"I trust I'm not a bore," he replied. "No; what I mean is, we shan't be able to smoke."

When all three were dressed, gloved, and bonneted, the whole thing seemed so ridiculous that none of them could refrain from laughing. Again and again shouts of laughter rang through the room, and the merriment was as continuous as it was loud. When their mirth had a little subsided, Agnes said, "Go ahead; you'd better have it out. You must not laugh when you get into the enemies' territories. Don't you think a life-preserver would be a good thing? Those Blue Joneses may show fight, and one doesn't know how many men they may have invited. I have a sort of thing with lead in it hanging up near the mantelpiece. Here it is. Can't one of you put it under your dress?"

"Wont it go in the pocket?" said Vigors.

"No; don't be so silly. You might hang it up inside your dress, between the dress and the crinoline. Come to me, I'll show you."

Vigors came as he was told, and made a sort of rustic curtsey, after the manner of country hoydens when their betters present them with little tracts about the narrow path, travelling along which may be presumed to be a sort of spiritual exercise. This created a new burst of laughter

amidst which Agnes fastened the life-preserver to the skirt of the dress. Being a tall woman herself, and wearing her dresses generally an inch or two upon the ground, Agnes did not find those she had lent the three men a bit too short, which was fortunate. A clarence took them all four to Sackville Street, and the men could not help feeling rather nervous as their assumed character was to be put to the test. They had taken a good deal of wine during the evening and were in high spirits, so there was more chance of their carrying the adventure to a successful termination. They only wished to simulate the opposite sex for a time. At last, that is, when their services were required, they were ready to throw off all disguise and do battle with any amount of opponents. It was fortunate, as will be seen in the end, that Vigors provided himself with so useful a weapon of defence or offence as the life-prescrver which Agnes had fastened to the skirt of the dress he wore. Going along Agnes gave them a little advice as to the etiquette to be observed on the occasion. They were not to speak much—in fact, only when spoken to. She should introduce them as three girls from Yorkshire, shy and unaccustomed to the society of gentlemen. The clarence drew up. The party alighted and shook their dresses as a bird shakes its ruffled plumes, and followed the footman upstairs. The Blue Joneses were in their drawing-room, the paper and furniture of which were blue ; everything upon which the eye rested was of the same monotonous never-varying colour. As Vigors observed, it was enough to give any one the blues

who looked at it. Billy Jones, as he had called himself, received Agnes with great cordiality, but looked at the other three women who accompanied her with a puzzled air. Seeing this, Agnes immediately exclaimed, "My cousins; they have come up all the way from Yorkshire. They only arrived this morning."

She added, in a half-whisper, "They are very rough and unsophisticated. Don't take much notice of them. Their voices are like ravens and their manners are awfully *gauche*. I have lent them some things to put on. Why bless you, they don't know what to make of it! They were never so smartly dressed in their lives before."

Then raising her voice—

"You had better sit down, you three. Take the first chair you can find, and make yourselves at home."

There was only one man present besides the brothers. This was an aristocratic-looking old man who was evidently going on for sixty, but he was still hale and hearty. Agnes remarked that he glanced impudently with an air of libertinism at her. She was accustomed to this sort of thing, and returned his gaze until she stared him out of countenance; his eyes fell to the ground, and he appeared rather confused.

There were wines of almost every description upon the table, and Billy Jones pressed some upon Agnes. "What will your cousins take?" he said.

"Oh, don't give them any wine!" exclaimed Agnes, quickly. "Do you want to make them

tipsy ? They will be as foolish as owls over a glass of sherry. Let them have some water; but I don't think they want anything, do you, dears ?"

The three men were almost suffocated with laughter. They dare not trust themselves to reply, so they shook their heads.

"For God's sake," said both the Blue Joneses to Agnes, "tell us what made you bring those three women. I never saw such dreadful animals in my life. You might have had some compassion upon us. Oh ! oh ! I shall burst out laughing in a minute. Can't you send them away again ?"

"I can, of course ; but you had better let them stay now they are here. It isn't often they get out for a holiday, and I want to show them a little life."

"Well, then, give them some money," said Billy, "and start them off to the Alhambra or some place."

"Why, Billy," said Agnes, in a reproving tone, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Why ?" he asked.

"Because they might get seduced, you know," replied Agnes.

This remark unfortunately was overheard by the three disguised officers. Graham and Scott with difficulty kept their countenances, but there appeared something so very funny about the idea that Vigors laughed. In trying to check himself he transformed the laugh into a countrified guffaw. A little poodle dog happened to be rolling himself upon the hearthrug, which Agnes with her woman's wit remarking, exclaimed—

"The girls are amused at the dog. It does look

funny, doesn't it? rolling about. It is what you call a tyke in Yorkshire, isn't it, Susan?"

This was addressed to Vigors, who began to laugh again at hearing himself addressed as Susan. His merriment was so violent that he looked as if he were going to have a fit over it. Harry Jones went up and patted him on the back. It was with the utmost difficulty that the poor fellow managed to subside into a comparative calm. How the other two contrived to refrain from the boisterous mirth of Vigors was a marvel to Agnes, but they did do so.

"Give us a kiss, Susan," exclaimed Harry Jones, in the good-natured voice one would adopt when speaking to a half-fledged rustic. But Vigors raised his hand and gave him a box on the ear which made it ring again, and sound as if he were holding a large conch shell to it, which is supposed to make a rushing noise like the sad sea waves when they put aside their melancholy and hang themselves out for a magnificent ship-destroying tempest.

"Oh, the vixen!" murmured Harry, retreating rapidly. "Well, I can safely say I never had a kiss refused me in so forcible and striking a manner before. I suppose that's what you may call a Yorkshire salute. If it is I won't expose myself to another."

Agnes and his brother laughed at his discomfiture, and the former said, "They are not used to that sort of thing."

"Chaste Dianas, I suppose," growled Harry, rubbing the side of his head. "What a thundering

heavy fist that girl's got to be sure! I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't felt it."

"It just serves you right," remarked Agnes; "you shouldn't be in such a hurry to kiss the girls."

Harry poured out a tumbler of sparkling Moselle and seemed to derive great consolation from it. The two brothers left the room together for a short time, after asking Agnes to excuse them, and while they were gone the old gentleman who had regarded her so attentively when she first arrived, sidled up to her and opened a conversation. He did not get much encouragement from Agnes, who gave him monosyllabic answers and fagged him about, taking a delight in making him wait upon her.

"You'd better give me some wine, old fellow," she exclaimed. "I can't say that you are very polite. You ought to be, though, for you look like a gentleman externally."

"I am extremely sorry," he returned, in a low voice, "if I have been remiss in any way; I am not usually looked upon as a bear."

"Well, give me some Moselle, and perhaps I shall have a better opinion of you."

He did as he was told. Broke the wire himself, cut the string, popped the cork, and poured out the foaming wine.

"Upon my word, you are very rude," said Agnes. "Go over there, and talk to my cousins. If they are wallflowers and haven't got a word to say for themselves, that is no reason why they should be neglected."

"I would much rather talk to you," he said.

"Ah! but I don't care about talking to you. I don't know who you are, and I always fight shy of anonymous men. That makes all the difference for me."

"I should have thought that my being a friend of your acquaintances, the Joneses——"

"The Blue Joneses; call them by their proper name."

"Very well, the Blue Joneses, if you like—would have been a sufficient introduction."

"Not at all," replied Agnes, with a supercilious smile. "I think being a friend of theirs, as you call it, anything but a recommendation. If you won't tell me your name, perhaps you can give me a reference. Who do you know? Any army men, for instance."

"Yes, several," he replied.

"Tell me one. I am pretty well up in the Army List."

Before he could reply to this query, the Blue Joneses returned, accompanied by four other men, three of whom were past fifty, the fourth being much younger, apparently not thirty.

There was a look of wild excitement about the features of every one of them, which almost frightened Agnes, as she remarked it. It, however, made no impression upon the gentleman with whom Agnes had been conversing. He must have noticed the circumstance as well as herself; but he seemed either accustomed to such appearances, or else he was acquainted with the cause. The young man commenced singing a song in a loud voice directly he

came into the room ; the other three men talked to one another upon a variety of subjects in a quick rapid way.

" What's the row with those fellows, Bill ? " exclaimed Agnes to the elder Blue Jones.

" Oh, nothing ! It is a way they've got."

" Is it ? Then I don't half like it. They look more like lunatics than anything else. I don't half like it."

" Oh, they are not that ! They are all right ; they wont hurt you," replied Blue Jones.

" I am not so sure of that. Now look here, Billy, I have heard of your games before now."

" Have you ? " he said, coolly. " Then if you didn't approve of them, why did you come ? "

" Never mind. I am here. And I advise you once for all not to try it on with me. I have a good mind to cut it now."

" I am sorry to say," replied Blue Jones, " that you couldn't, if you wished to ; because I have not done with you yet. It would be a pity to lose so much beauty so soon."

Agnes bit her lips, but made no reply. She saw clearly enough that she had been entrapped ; but she consoled herself with the reflection that she had a reserve not far off, who were, she confidently thought, a match for all the people in the room.

The three old men remained together, talking, laughing and gesticulating with the wildest and most extraordinary good humour. They never touched a drop of wine or any liquor ; their spirits were spontaneous, as far as Agnes could judge.

The whole scene was a mystery to her. The young man sat down upon a chair with his face to the back, over which he folded his arms and gazed at the three strange women, who still preserved their rigid deportment and silent demeanour. Agnes began to grow alarmed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OPIUM CLUB.

AGNES repented her rashness in embarking in the perilous adventure which was approaching its development. It was a strange scene ; but had the Blue Joneses been aware of the real character of the three strange women they wouldn't have gone so boldly to work as they did. Agnes noticed that the old gentleman with whom she had been conversing spoke to the elder Jones, as if urging him to do something without any further delay. Jones nodded his head and crossed over to Agnes.

"What have you been plotting with that old party ?" she asked, with a forced smile.

" You may as well know what we want with you," replied Billy. " You see that old fellow's an artist, and he has long wished to have you for a model. Propositions have been made to you, through some of his agents, but you have always refused to listen to his proposals, however liberal his terms may have been. He only wants you for five or six hours ; perhaps not so long. We have an atelier through a door in the opposite wall, comfortably furnished, with a fire and all that sort of thing—so you had better oblige the old gentleman. He is mad about it ; he has paid us a good bit of money, and you shall stand in, if you don't make any fuss

over it. It is all in the interest of, and for the sake of art, so you need not be alarmed about the propriety of the thing. He will treat you as if he were your father and you were his only daughter."

Agnes had her own opinions about this. But her indignation at the infamous way in which she had been tricked was so great that at first she could not speak. When she could, she poured forth a torrent of invective against the treacherous man who had inveigled her into his house under the basest of false pretences. If her language was somewhat vituperative, the circumstances, irritating and distressing as they were, were sufficiently provocative of the harshest epithets her vocabulary could supply.

"Why, you infernal old ruffian," she said, "I'll smash your head open with a decanter if you dare to talk to me like that. If you want a woman who will consent to the sort of thing you have been beast enough to propose to me, you had better go to the Strand and pick up some one who will. You never made a greater mistake in your life than pitching upon me. And as for that old goat, just let me get at him, that's all. I'll tear his eyes out."

"Excuse me, but you will do nothing of the sort," replied Billy Jones.

"Who or what's to prevent me?" asked Agnes.

"I shall, most certainly, if you become violent."

"*You!* So I should think. Try it, that's all. Try it."

"If you don't be quiet I shall tie your arms

behind your back," said Jones, "and you will be carried into the studio. Once there, the artist can arrange you in any position he wishes."

An unusual stir at the other end of the room caused Agnes to turn her attention to that quarter. From what she saw it appeared that the three men she had remarked as being excitedly loquacious and somewhat maniacal in their manner, had left off talking, and were attempting to enter into conversation with the three officers, who were impatiently awaiting the time for them to throw off their assumed character to arrive. It was nearer than they expected. One of the men sat near Vigors and attempted to put his arm round his waist. He served him as he had served Harry Jones a little while before, only this time the blow was so well put in that it completely prostrated his impudent and amorous assailant. This was the scuffle that had roused Agnes. While she was smiling at this proof of Vigors' strength, she felt herself seized from behind. She had no doubt that the eldest Jones was putting his threat into execution. She uttered one loud, prolonged shriek. Its thrilling cadences had scarcely died away before she was free. A crushing blow from Vigors' fist knocked Blue Jones head over heels under a table. Graham flew at Harry Jones, and a fair stand-up fight ensued. Scott looked out for a victim, and occupied himself with the three men who had been endeavouring to make love to himself and his friends, under the impression that they were members of the softer sex. A general mêlée ensued. Agnes, in spite of her alarm and

terror at the exciting scene of which she was the centre—of which she had been the spark to set light to—could not refrain from smiling when she saw her three champions in their dresses and crinolines doing considerable execution amongst those who opposed them. They had torn the veils off at the commencement of the struggle, and their hairy faces gave them a sort of Julia Pastrana appearance. The astonishment of the Blue Joneses was very great ; you could plainly see it in their faces, which were also convulsed with rage. Directly Vigors had settled his business with Billy Jones, he strode over to where the artist was standing, and sent him rolling over, half stunned, into a corner. Billy Jones, as soon as he could conveniently do so, emerged from his undignified position and once more assumed the defensive. Vigors now drew out his life-prcserver, and struck Billy Jones with considerable force on the head ; he fell like a log, and Vigors was at liberty to go to the succour of his friends. Graham was hard pressed by Harry Jones, but Vigors, without the least hesitation, treated him as he had done his brother. The other men, against whom Scott was defending himself, were driven into a corner, where they remained passive spectators of what was to follow. The young man who had entered the room with them was unable to take any part in the conflict. He had fallen asleep upon a sociable which stood in the centre of the apartment.

The victors looked around, thirsting, like the Macedonian, for something more to subdue. Tear-

ing down a picture from the wall, Vigors appropriated the cord, and securely bound the elder Jones. Graham treated the younger one in a precisely similar manner. "'Pon my word, that was fine!" exclaimed Vigors, going to the table and helping himself to a couple of tumblers, one after the other, of champagne. "Got a weed, Graham?"

"Sorry to say I haven't; left my case in my coat pocket."

"I think this place would be all the better for being smashed up," observed Scott.

"Yes; I think we will make a little hay in it before we take our departure," replied Vigors.

"You are bricks, you three!" exclaimed Agnes, recovering her equanimity all at once directly she saw her enemies disposed of.

"What a time we had to sit still, though!" said Graham; "I thought I must have jumped up two or three times."

Vigors handed Agnes some wine, which she drank. After refreshing themselves the three men commenced the work of demolition; they began with the looking-glasses and pictures, ending with the carpet and chairs. The chandeliers they spared because they required their light. In a quarter of an hour the blue-room was a complete wreck.

"I don't think these Blue Joneses will kidnap women again in a hurry," remarked Vigors, panting with exertion, and having recourse again to the glorious vintage.

"Not if they come from Yorkshire," said Agnes, with a meaning look.

"I want to find out some of the mysteries of this den of Satan and of thieves before I leave," said Graham. "Suppose we secure our prisoners and explore a little."

The proposal was cordially agreed to; more picture-frames were torn down, more cord was put into requisition, and the hands and legs of all the men in the room who were prisoners of war were securely fastened. The two Joneses were able to open their eyes and see what was going on; but they were too weak to make any demonstration or offer any expostulation. After some search a door was discovered in the wall, which it was not easy to notice without careful scrutiny, as it was covered with the same blue paper as the walls. It was resolved that they should go through this and commence their exploration. The secret door conducted the party into a studio fitted up with all the appliances of the painter's craft. A few unfinished pictures resting on the easels were noticeable here and there. The men in their fantastic and unwonted attire looked like mummers going home after the fatigues of some masked ball, amidst the absurdities of which they had been spending the evening. Their bonnets were torn and worn away, and Vigors' dress had been rent in one place from the gathers, and revealed the delicate fibres of his quilted crinoline. The studio did not claim their attention for any length of time. Espying a staircase at one end they descended it, and came at length to a green baize door which swung back upon its well-oiled hinges at the slightest

touch. Vigors was the pioneer, but he stood still upon the threshold, amazed at the spectacle which met his gaze. A vivid, blinding rush of light swept through the half-opened door, dazzling his eyes. A cloud of hot air, heavily charged with some subtle odour not displeasing to the senses, floated past him. The room was of large size, and furnished with divans, which ran all round it in true Oriental fashion. Stretched upon these were a number of men in every conceivable variety of posture. Some were engaged in smoking, others, apparently prostrated by their inhalations, were lying in a dreamy stupor, gazing vacantly at the ceiling. The vacuity of the countenances of those men, the meaningless look they wore, the blank idiotic stare which sat upon their pallid features, induced you at first sight to think that you had unwittingly been introduced into a ward of the Earlswood Asylum. But after a moment's reflection Vigors knew better. He could not doubt for an instant that this was the famous Opium Club of which he had heard. Men spoke of it at mess under their breath. It was reported that the members were sworn to secrecy, and so no one could tell where the Club actually had its being. But here was evidence enough and to spare. The spectacle, disgusting and yet humiliating, upon which Vigors intently fixed his regards, was conclusive as to the existence of the horrible society, the members of which, by means of a pernicious and soul-destroying drug, reduced themselves to a bestial and brutalized condition. The men who had followed the Blue Joneses upstairs were opium-

eaters and smokers. But they were not just then far gone. The young man who went to sleep was in the most advanced stage, and was probably now revelling in the most delightful or perchance the most horribly frightful and excruciating visions which the human mind in a diseased state is capable of conjuring up by the aid of the wand of the opium magician. Seeing Vigors hesitate, those behind him opened the door a little wider and pushed in. If he was astonished, they were petrified. Agnes did not know what to make of the wonderful scene which was exposed to her startled view. "For God's sake, what are they doing?" she exclaimed.

"This is the Opium Club," replied Vigors. "I have often heard of it, but I never knew before that they met here. I was at Egerton's one day, and I heard some men I knew very well talking about it. Some of these men who are lying on the cushions like so many beasts are tearing swells when they are at home, but here, as you perceive, the deadly fumes of opium level all distinctions."

Graham and Scott were as much astonished as Agnes, and as Vigors seemed to be pretty well informed about the matter they asked him innumerable questions, to which he replied to the best of his ability. Their advent did not appear to excite any astonishment amongst those whose brains were either already saturated or else were in a fair way to shortly become so. A few languid, heavy-looking eyes were turned towards them. Sometimes a loud, ringing laugh would startle the echoes of the room, and now and then a man

uld commence an harangue and talk at the rest object, animate or inanimate.

"Come, I think we've had enough of this," exaimed Vigors. "It is not a nice thing to see a ot of fellows bring themselves to this state."

"I shouldn't have believed it if any one had taken his oath about it," replied Graham.

"It beats everything I have ever seen in a canter," said Scott. "It is as bad as a lot of Chinamen with pigtails. Well, shall we be moving?"

Although a distressing sight, it also had a species of fascination peculiar to itsclf, and Agnes found some difficulty in removing her eycs from it. The party retraced their steps, passed through the atelier once more, and entered a second time upon the scene of their exploits. Their prisoners were still in the helpless position in which they had been left. The Blue Joneses, however, were conversing with one another, and in common justice to those two illustrious men and proprietors of the Opium Club, it must be acknowledged that they blasphemed with an earnestness worthy of Pagans and those who worship idols. Agnes went up to Billy Jones and said, "Good-night, old fellow; I'm going. I have spent a very jolly evening. Mind you drop me a line when you give another little party. I'll be sure and come early. Shall I bring any friends with me? I have a few coming up from Yorkshire."

Billy Jones ground his teeth together with im-
potent rage. Agnes then led the way out of the room, descnded the stairs, and opened the street-

door. The clarence was waiting for them. Without being observed by anybody, the three men got in, and Agnes ordered the coachman to drive as quickly as he could to her house. Neither Graham, nor Vigors nor Scott were at all sorry to tumble into their own things once more. When they were fully attired, Agnes said, "What time is it? It can't be more than half-past one or two."

"Wants a few minutes to two," replied Graham.

"Oh, let us go to Mott's, then!" she exclaimed.

"Can't go to Mott's—we're not in evening dress," replied Graham.

"I forgot that," said Agnes.

"Well, if we can't go there, let's do something. Can't you go and change? Where are you stopping?"

"I'm putting up at Lindsay's, but going back there will make it so late. Won't Kate's do?"

"Yes!—I don't care," she answered. "I have been so excited this evening that I must go somewhere. I am sure that opium room is enough to give one the horrors for a week! I couldn't sleep! I shudder when I think of it! I shall make a night of it!—you fellows can please yourselves."

Finally it was arranged that they should go to the Café Royal. A couple of hansoms were chartered, and they were not long in depositing their freight in the classic neighbourhood of Princes Street, Leicester Square. Here Agnes was at home; she met many of her admirers; and Graham and his friends were soon sitting disconsolately by themselves; but if the fair are fickle, the men are false,

for they soon adapted themselves to the exigencies of the occasion, and three charming Venuses were soon appropriated by the three men, who at six o'clock that morning were hardly in a fit state to give the word had they been challenged by the sentry. "Who goes there?" would have sounded in their ears as an unmeaning phrase ; and if the word 'friend !' did suggest itself to them, it would have been strangely metamorphosed by a dissonant hiccup which sometimes will be generated from the ghost of disembodied champagne. Agnes had not been half an hour at Kate's before she met a Guardsman under whose tender protection she went to Mott's, and stayed there till the lively strains of the Sturm March Galop warned her that it was time to go.

CHAPTER V.

THE ASTROLOGER.

THE first thing which forced itself upon Agnes Willoughby's recollection on the ensuing day was her engagement in the evening at Mr. Dicks's house in Piccadilly. She wondered what Horace St. John Warner would be like, and whether she would have to simulate an interest in him, as had been her painful necessity on more than one former occasion. She rang her bell about one o'clock, which was the time at which she awoke. Her maid came up in answer to the summons. Strictly speaking, she could not be called lady's-maid, for she had other duties to perform. Agnes had only two servants—her cook, and Wilkins, who was what she called her maid. But the onerous duties of making her mistress's bed and taking care of her mistress's pet-dog, "Fluff," with several other things, devolved upon her.

"Shall I do your hair this morning, mum?" asked Wilkins; "or will you wait till you dress to go out in the evening?"

"Oh! I can't be bothered with my hair now," replied Agnes. "Give me my pink wrapper. I want something to eat. You always think I can live upon air."

"Cook's got some pickled salmon, mum, and some cold tongue, and some ham, and—"

"There—that will do," said Agnes, interrupting Wilkins. "Do you want to make me ill? You're like the bill of fare in a Leicester Square dining-place. I never saw such a woman as you are to talk. How is it, Wilkins, you can't help making yourself such a bore?"

"Sure I don't know, mum. Wasn't always so considered."

"There you go again. You can't help answering me. Why I keep you I don't know. The fact is, I can't stand you. Look here. You may as well make an end of it at once. You'd better suit yourself as soon as you conveniently can!"

"Very well, mum, I'll do so," replied Wilkins, in a respectful tone. Wilkins had heard the same sort of thing so often when her mistress had been out all night and woke up crapulous and in a bad humour, that she took it all as a matter of course. She was very well satisfied with her place, and had not the remotest intention of leaving Agnes, out of whom she made a very good living and contrived to get hold of a great many pickings, which had already allowed her to accumulate a handsome sum in a savings bank in the immediate vicinity. She was somewhat of a miser, and her principal delight was in looking over her book and seeing how many pounds stood to her credit. It is considered by many people the most delicious feeling that life has it in its power to bestow, to be able to watch a small sum of money growing gradually larger and

larger, until you can walk about with the proud consciousness of being a capitalist able to draw your own cheques and hold yourself independent of the world, and feel that you are above the petty miseries of poverty, and that you can pass your old age in comparative happiness, if not in affluence and splendour.

" You may as well pack up your boxes to-night, Wilkins," said Agnes. " If you don't go at once I shall get spoony over the matter, and you won't go at all. My dress will catch fire, and you'll put it out, or poor little Fluff will get the distemper, and you will cure him or something, and then I shan't like to part with you ; so you'd better hook it off while I'm in a rage with you. How much is there owing to you ? "

" I shall want a quarter's wages, mum," replied Wilkins. " You know it is always customary."

" There," exclaimed Agnes, " I thought that's how it would be. A quarter's wages ? I haven't got the money. You'll have to stop till to-morrow, till I can get it. You are like a leech, Wilkins, you stick to me. I can see I shall never get rid of you."

Agnes sighed, as if she was troubled beyond expression, worried to the extreme limit of human endurance. Suddenly she saw the little box of gold dust which Mr. Dicks had given her. It was lying on the dressing-table, where she had put it the night before. Taking the lid off, she poured some of the shining particles into her hand, and cast them in a glittering shower over her head. The effect was inexpressibly pretty. Being the colour of the hair, you could not detect their presence ; but whenever the light fell upon them they sparkled and

scintillated as if Agnes were one of those fair damosels in the ancient pictures who are represented with halos round their heads.

"Oh, how pretty, mum," exclaimed Wilkins, with an amount of rapture in her tone which did infinite credit to her powers of simulation.

"Yes; isn't it?" replied Agnes, like a child pleased with a new toy, and forgetting all about her grievance and the notice of dismissal she had just given her maid.

"I think I never did in my life see anything so pretty," continued Wilkins, knowing that she was this time harping upon the right string. "Why, you look like a hangel, mum!"

Agnes looked at herself for some little while, placing herself in every possible position. She was much gratified: but when the novelty of the thing wore off, she once more turned her attention to Wilkins, and exclaimed, "Now, what did I tell you? You are the most tiresome woman that ever lived! Didn't I tell you to go and order breakfast?"

Wilkins could, with great truth, have replied in the negative, but she was wise in her generation, and knew that her mistress did not like to be contradicted; so she went downstairs to fulfil the order, muttering to herself, "What would she do without she had me to bully?"

Her egotism prevented the very obvious reply, "Why, get somebody else!" to suggest itself to her.

While Agnes was at breakfast, a lady drove up to the door of her house. She was driving a pretty pair of cream-coloured ponies in a very handsome

pony carriage. When she heard the sound of the stoppage, Agnes glided up to the window and looked out. "Oh!" she exclaimed, drawing back the curtain, so as to have a good peep at her visitor. "Oh! it's the Nun. What brings her here, I wonder? Shall I say I'm out? No, I won't! She's not a bad sort."

"Are you at home, mum?" inquired Wilkins, putting her head in at the door.

"Yes. Show her in here," replied Agnes.

Presently a demure looking little woman, dressed in black, but wearing her things with remarkable grace, and possessing a most ladylike manner and appearance, entered.

"My dear Letty, how are you?" said Agnes. "It's quite an age since you have been to see me."

"I have been over to Dublin with the Tenth," replied the new-comer.

"Still in the same regiment?" asked Agnes.

"Yes. Very constant, you see. I had the ponies out to-day, so I thought I'd run over and look you up. What do you think? I had my fortune told yesterday!"

"Oh, how delightful! That is just what I have been longing for I don't know how long. Was it flattering? What sort of a fortune-teller was he?"

"It wasn't particularly flattering. He said I should never be married, but that I should always be very happy. He's a fool to say that, because I might marry to-morrow if I chose. Only what's the good marrying without you get a fellow you like,

and who's got plenty of money, or anyhow enough to keep you properly?"

"Of course. Why, no good at all!" replied Agnes.
"But, I say, where does this fellow live?"

"Somewhere in Westminster," said the Nun.
"I've got the address in the carriage."

"Will you take me?"

"I'll drive you over now if you like."

"Thanks. I wont be long getting ready. I say, I saw some one who was asking about you. Do you know Graham, and Vigors, and that set?"

"Yes, I should think I did, too," replied Letty.
"Vigors is one of the nicest fellows out. What about him?"

"Why, last night we had no end of fun. But I'll tell you as we go along. It was with the Blue Joneses; you must have heard of them?"

"Those beasts!" ejaculated the Nun. "I should advise any woman to steer clear of them."

"What will you have? Just help yourself, will you? Can you eat anything? Make yourself at home, Letty. I'll run upstairs and dress."

The Nun went to the cheffonier and helped herself to some absinthe, which she was sufficiently unEnglish in her tastes to prefer to malt liquor in any shape.

Agnes was not long before she came down from her bedroom and announced herself in readiness.
"What does he charge?" she asked. "I have two or three pounds, will that be enough?"

"Lots," replied Letty; "he only charges a skiv. He'll tell you a heap of things for that."

Although the Nun had described the astrologer's house as being in the neighbourhood of Westminster, it was, strictly speaking, in Kennington; for after driving until within a short distance of the Horns Tavern, near Kennington Common, or Park as it is now called, Letty turned off and went in the direction of Vauxhall. Threading a quiet and almost mouldy-looking lane, with a row of ghastly poplars on one side, she pulled up before a two-storied brick-built house, which to Agnes's excited fancy had an antiquated and weird appearance; the bricks of which it was composed were black and sooty from long exposure to the weather. A covered way led from the front door through the garden to the gate at which they entered. The garden was not of large dimensions, but it extended for a few feet all round the house, which was detached from the others in the street. The windows of the house were of that old-fashioned make which is attributed to Queen Anne's reign, and which you may see at Kensington Palace or at the late Mr. Thackeray's new house, erected upon the same model, in Palace Gardens. The Nun then threw the reins to her servant, and getting out of the pony-carriage rang the bell. It was answered by an old woman, who approached as nearly as possible to a Macbeth witch or one of Endor. There might have been a dash of Mother Shipton in her, with the least suspicion of Hecate; but there was no question whatever as to her being connected with evil spirits, and those of them who are foul and addicted to lying. The astrologer did not give

himself any outlandish name, he was simply Mr. Melmoth.

In reply to Letty's question as to whether he was within and disengaged, the servant replied in the affirmative to the first query, in the negative to the second. "He had," she said, "two ladies with him, but they had been there some time, and would in all probability leave in less than five minutes. Would they walk in and sit down?"

They followed the old hag into the house. The entrance-hall bore no evidence of quackery. It was furnished as any other one would have been, with a lamp and a few chairs upon some oilcloth. The Macbeth witch conducted them into a small sitting-room which, from its surroundings, bore a great resemblance to that dreadful apartment which you are ushered into when you go to pay a visit to your dentist. It is true no horrible instruments of torture meet your gaze, but your mind is filled with the frightful anticipation of forceps, and open mouths, and wrenchers, and "Ah! there it is," and glasses of hot water with a dash of eau-de-Cologne in them. You usually have to dance attendance upon your fashionable dentist for at least an hour. Innumerable volumes of Punch mock your misery, and you feel a Robinson Crusoe sort of desolation. In the astrologer's waiting-room a few cases of stuffed birds and animals invited attention. A table covered with old-fashioned books relating to the science of astrology, from amongst which Zadkiel's almanack was carefully excluded, temptingly invited perusal. The walls were adorned

with very old plates of the Rake's Progress, in black frames, between which appeared enigmatical representations of the signs of the zodiac, and the sun, moon, and stars.

"Did they show you in here?" asked Agnes.

"Yes," replied Letty, "I had to wait a short time. He seems to have lots of people. I'll tell you where I heard of him. I went to Salter's to pay a bill for horses, and two gentlemanly fellows were talking together, and one said what an extraordinary man this Melmoth was. The other asked him where he lived. I caught the address as I went by and put it down, and having nothing better to do yesterday I drove up here. He will ask you if you wish simply to have your fortune told, or your horoscope cast. The first is a skiv; I think the other is three."

"I shall go in for the horoscope," replied Agnes; "I don't care about a pound or two."

The Macbeth witch now entered to announce that Mr. Melmoth would be glad to see them.

"What will you do?" said Agnes.

"Oh, come with you, if you don't mind. I should like to see the fun," replied the Nun.

The room in which the astrologer sat was considerably larger than the one they had just left. Strange to say there were none of those horrible objects with which a charlatan would seek to impress those who came to consult him. No snakes in vials, no skeletons, no stuffed constrictors or inanimate pythons; everything was as plain and simple as the office of a merchant or any other man.

of business. Melmoth himself was a venerable-looking personage, quite sixty years old if he was a day. He had a flowing beard, and long grey hair. His face was thin and elongated, which a critic might consider the result of deep thought and continuous study, or put it down as constitutional, whichever he liked best. A few sheets of writing-paper lay on a desk before him, together with pen, ink, and sealing-wax. He did not rise as his visitors entered, but contented himself with bowing in a stiff and formal manner.

"Good morning," said Letty; "I have brought a friend of mine who wants to have her fortune told."

"I am glad to see you," replied Melmoth in a melodious voice, which differed totally from the deep bass you might have expected from so mysterious a personage. It was clear that he did not rely upon display. His dress was not different from that of others, except in its being entirely grey.

"Will your friend have her horoscope taken? There are my terms." As he spoke he pushed a printed paper over to Agnes, at the same time begging them to be seated.

Agnes opened her purse and laid three sovereigns upon the table. Melmoth secured it in a drawer, and exclaimed, "Will you be good enough to answer a few questions I shall put to you?"

Melmoth wrote the questions which he wished Agnes to answer on a slip of paper. They referred chiefly to her age, when and where she was born, the hour, and others of a similar nature. She

wrote the replies and handed the paper back to him. He glanced over it and begged the ladies to excuse him for a short time. Rising from his chair, he crossed the room with a stately step and lifted a curtain which divided the room into two compartments. Agnes had omitted to notice this before; she had taken the curtain for a piece of dull coloured tapestry. When the capacious folds of drapery had fallen down again and concealed the form of the astrologer from their view, Agnes exclaimed—“What a funny looking old bird it is! What is he going to do now?”

“I’m sure I can’t tell you,” replied Letty. “I was never horoscoped. He put a lot of what barristers would call leading questions to me, with which I fenced as well as I could, and then he gave me his idea of my future.”

Melmoth did not keep Agnes long waiting. Lifting up the curtain a second time, he beckoned to her in a patriarchal manner. She rose and prepared to obey his gesture. The Nun was about to accompany her friend, but the astrologer waved her back, and she resumed her seat, panting with vexation and curiosity; resolving on the first opportunity to come again, pay her three guineas, and have a peep at the Eleusinian mysteries of astrologic lore. Agnes passed into the secret apartment and trembled slightly with apprehension. The room was dimly lighted by an oil lamp, which depended from the ceiling by an iron chain of ominous appearance. A strange odour pervaded the apartment, which Agnes perceived emanated

from a censer which was also pendant, and which swung backwards and forwards monotonously, emitting its fragrant essence of musk and frankincense in its frequent passage. The walls of this room were quite black. They were shrouded in a species of dark drapery with which the floor was also covered, with the exception of a small space in the centre, upon which stood a sofa. This was the only article of furniture in the room. Fanciful representations of the celestial constellations were faintly visible upon the ceiling, amongst which Scorpio was most conspicuous. The astrologer motioned Agnes to take a seat upon the sofa. Not a little nervous at the funereal look of the apartment, and wondering what was next to happen, Agnes did as she was told. No sooner had she done so than Melmoth sat down beside her. When he approached her so closely, she remarked that he had either changed his dress or slipped a long black garment over his body. It was a robe like that of a priest, and formed of serge, upon which were emblazoned symbols and mystical signs in golden characters. A hat of a conical shape was on his head, but the colour of this was the same as that of his gaberdine. In his hand he held a wand. Agnes began to grow alarmed, but being of a courageous disposition, she determined to go through with the adventure now it had progressed so far. She compressed her lips firmly together and waited in a state of expectancy. Melmoth muttered some weird incantation and waved his wand in the air. A soft, thrilling strain

of ethereal music, like that given out by the vibration of the strings of an Æolian harp, sounded on all sides. Agnes could not tell from whence it came. It was fascinating beyond measure. She listened to it entranced. It had hardly continued a minute before she felt that the sofa upon which she was reclining was descending gradually. It was sinking by slow gradations through the flooring. She was inclined to shriek for assistance, but an indescribable something prevented her from doing so. Whether the incense had enervated her, or whether the sweet-sounding music had, with its dulcet and seductive tones, lulled her accustomed energy to sleep, she could not tell; but she was utterly unable to cry aloud. Slowly the sofa proceeded on its downward course. The level of the floor was reached, then passed, and Agnes found herself in another and still stranger chamber. It was entirely circular in its formation, and of considerable extent. Lamps hung in four places from the ceiling and rendered every part of it visible. On a bracket sat a hideous baboon jabbering to himself. Around a pole projecting from the wall was coiled a huge serpent, who ever and anon darted out its forked tongue, and flashed sparks from its scintillating eyes. The walls of the vault were of the same dark colour as those of the rooms upstairs. The floor was nothing more or less than common earth trampled into a sort of concrete hardness. The astrologer rose from the sofa directly it touched the ground. Advancing towards a chair made of curiously shaped boughs of trees, put together

in a fantastic manner, he placed it near Agnes and bade her take possession of it. She did so almost mechanically—she was like an automaton. Directly she left it the sofa shot up again with inconceivable velocity, and formed part and parcel of the ceiling. Agnes was ready to sink with terror when she perceived this. To be left alone with the astrologer in this dismal circular vault was almost more than her already over-wrought nerves could bear. She leaned back in the wickerwork armchair and watched feverishly for the sequel, or at all events for the next proceeding on the part of the astrologer, her acquaintance with whom had as yet been prolific of horrors. The snake twisted and intertwined his body, now elongating his head and neck and gyrating it, a moment afterwards liberating his tail and cleaving the air ominously with it. To Agnes' excited fancy the very chair upon which she was sitting seemed to be a congeries of snakes which held her in their fatally venomous embrace. Melmoth whistled in a peculiar manner, and the serpent instantly became attentive. As its master's efforts continued, it allowed its head to fall to the ground. It hung suspended by its tail, and looked like a huge tendril of the banana-tree in the jungle of its native wilds. At last its speckled belly touched the soil, and it glided along to the centre of the room where the astrologer was standing. The baboon chattered and gesticulated in a manner calculated to inspire any neophyte with terror. Melmoth sought in his breast and extracted a piece of eardboard and a

stick of black chalk. These he handed to Agnes exclaiming, in a voice which sounded sepulchrally in her ear, "Watch the serpent, and copy the characters he forms upon the paper." Agnes took the cardboard and the chalk, and with some interest prepared to do as the astrologer told her. He continued whistling for some time longer, then he left off and made some cabalistic letters in the air with his wand—he was going through some favourite abracadabra—it was the beginning of the incantation. Presently he sang some Arabic words to a sing-song tune, which the snake appreciated by waving its neck about and keeping the most accurate time to the music. When Melmoth finished there was a dead silence. He next sat down upon the cold ground and moved his wand over the serpent in various and peculiar forms, causing it to move its body in obedience probably to some well-known command. In quick succession the snake contorted its sinuous form into the following letters, which Agnes faithfully copied upon the cardboard :—A N E E R. Then came a pause—however, not of long duration. The snake lay at full length as if exhausted, but presently it again resumed its labour, and worked its body into the following letters, not one of which Agnes omitted—A E I. At the expiration of the serpent's task Melmoth extended his arm and permitted it to climb round it, and opened his robe, allowing it to nestle in his breast in a chilly coil for a moment. Turning to Agnes, he said, "Have you marked him well?"

"I think so," she replied, timidly.

Apparently satisfied with this answer, Melmoth put his hand inside his robe and drew out the serpent, whom he carefully wrapped in a blanket, which he deposited on the ground. Then he went towards the wall and touched a spring, the whereabouts of which was known to himself alone. The sofa instantly began to descend. When it touched the bottom he requested Agnes to take her place upon it as before. When she had done so it commenced its upward flight, and landed them in the room above, to Agnes' irrepressible satisfaction. The perfumed censer was still swinging to and fro, and the lamp gave out its dim, and what in the days of gas we may call its mediæval light.

"Give me the paper!" exclaimed the astrologer.

Agnes complied with his request, and after looking at it for a moment, said, "The serpent which you have seen is the exponent of my oracular predictions. Its utterances, if I may call them so, are brief, but they are verities. You will hear no lying delusion from me, young lady. The first letters you have here, form the word *aneer*, which corresponds to the Greek *ανηρ*, a man; the other letters make *aei*, which is the same as the Greek *αει*, which, when interpreted, is 'for ever.' This to you is enigmatical, but if you will kindly step into the other room and rejoin your friend, who must be getting impatient at your prolonged absence, I will work out your horoscope, and bring you the result as speedily as possible."

Agnes made no reply, but lifted up the curtain

and looked once more upon the light of day. She was too much pleased at first to speak.

"Well," exclaimed the Nun in an agony of ungratified curiosity, "what did he do?"

"Oh! it frightened me awfully at first; but I rather liked it at last. That is, when I got used to it," replied Agnes with a slight sacrifice of the truth.

"But what was it? Oh! do tell me. I am dying to hear," exclaimed the Nun.

Thus appealed to, Agnes proceeded to tell her friend Letty all that she had witnessed. She shuddered a little at the recital, and declared that if that was the sort of thing she had to expect if she had her horoscope drawn, she would rather be without it.

A quarter of an hour elapsed before Melmoth made his appearance. When he did so he held a scroll of parchment in his hand. It was rolled up and tied with a piece of red ribbon. "Take it," he exclaimed; "read it at your leisure. Should you wish to consult me upon any further point, I shall be happy to place myself at your service." Holding the door open with his hand, he bowed the ladies out. The Macbeth witch was waiting outside, and she opened the street door with an alacrity and avidity which denoted that she was open to a gratuity should such a thing be tendered her. The Nun gave her half-a-crown, for which she appeared perfectly prepared to fall down on her knees and worship the donor. "Drive to my house, Letty, will you dear?" said Agnes. "I am going out to-night, and I want

to have a sleep before I dine. If you want to go home particularly, I'll get a cab."

"No; I'll drive you home," replied the Nun, making the pony-chaise spin along.

Agnes took out the scroll, untied the ribbon, and read. "The man, I interpret thus—You will shortly meet one whom it will be your interest to cultivate. Your fates will unite you closely. For ever, bears this signification—The man will marry you, and in spite of every effort of your enemies you will be his wife to the day of his death. The stars say no more."

"Strange!" muttered Agnes. "I wonder whether it will really happen so!"

The Nun snatched up the scroll with one hand, and held the reins with the other. When she had read its contents she said, "You don't believe this, do you?"

"I hardly know," replied Agnes, thoughtfully.

CHAPTER VI.

ST. JOHN WARNER.

LETTY could not spare time to go into her friend's house. She drove her there and then went rapidly in the direction of her own home. Agnes had a modest dinner, which the careful Wilkins had provided for her, and afterwards laid down for an hour in order that she might be in readiness for the new part in an old play that she had undertaken to perform that evening.

Mr. Dicks' rooms never appeared to more advantage than they did when Agnes arrived. They were well lighted up, and not too thronged. Events crowded together so quickly in Agnes Willoughby's career that she had already forgotten the adventure of the night before with the Blue Joneses. She thought a little about the strange prophecy of the astrologer, and wondered whether his prediction would ever be realized. Charley Dicks received Agnes directly she arrived.

"Is he here?" she asked in a whisper.

"Just come," was the reply.

There were perhaps a dozen men in the room, and half as many women. Agnes allowed her eyes to sweep round the assembly. At last they settled, as a hawk's might on a dove, upon a young man who was engaged in conversation with a fair-haired

woman, certainly good-looking, but not to be compared to Agnes. She knew him in a moment. He was the facsimile of his portrait. It was Horace St. John Warner. Agnes removed her glance immediately; she did not wish him to remark that she was noticing him, or in other words, honouring him with a well-bred stare. She had reconnoitred the enemy's position like a skilful general, and she was now prepared to give battle whenever a resort to such extreme measures might be necessary.

"Go and talk to some fellow; there are two or three you know here," continued Dicks. "I'll take care to introduce you at the right moment. Snub him a little at first; he'll like you all the better for it."

"All right!" replied Agnes.

She knew that men, as a rule, do not care about women who sit with their backs to the wall and look spoony. They like some one who can talk, and especially if he be a young man and a little shy, he is very thankful to any one who will help him like a lame dog over the conversational stile. So she cordially acquiesced in her Mentor's advice. She had hardly done speaking to Dicks when two men in evening dress, with some lilies of the valley in their button-holes and their Gibuses under their arms sauntered up to her.

"How are you?" one of them exclaimed in an affected tone; "I'm so glad you are come! When I saw you I said to my friend here—excuse me; Mr. Cumberland, Miss Agnes Willoughby—dying to be introduced, you know, but I thought I would

be cruel and keep him waiting—I said to Cumberland, ‘Thank goodness there’s some one at last one can talk to!’ and he said with his usual simplicity—he’s a great ass, I must tell you—‘Is there? who is it?’ ‘Why,’ I replied, ‘are you a man about town and haven’t the pleasure of Miss Willoughby’s acquaintance? I shall most certainly cut you dead at Arthur’s, and if any fellow says, ‘Why are you cutting Cumberland?’ or, ‘What’s that poor beggar Cumberland done that he’s to be cut?’ I shall say, ‘Why, look here, he doesn’t know Agnes Willoughby!’ and then they’ll cut him too, and so he’ll have to leave the club after that.’”

“You don’t believe all that fellow’s saying about me?” exclaimed Cumberland—a handsome dark man with a beard, and a look of foreign service about him. He had been trying to put in a word or two of exculpation for some time, but his friend would not let him.

“I’m inclined to think he has exaggerated a little,” replied Agnes, “and I shall intercede for you this time.”

“’Pon my word that’s very charming of you,” said Cumberland. “The fact is I have not been in England long. I’ve just come back from India, after being quartered for I don’t know how long in a wretched place on the Burmese frontier called Thyet-Myoo, with only two towns—Prome and Rangoon—within a couple of hundred miles. Never saw a petticoat, I assure you, for months and months after I left Calcutta, except once through a strong glass as we passed the Andaman Islands,

So you see there is some slight excuse for my not having the pleasure of your acquaintance. I think now you ought to tell Bridges to shut up."

"I say, you know," said Bridges, "this wont do. I'm not going to be cut out by a sort of military ticket-of-leave man, whose sentence of five years' exile is just over."

"If you are in the Blues you are not everybody, m dear fellow," said Agnes.

"Oh yes, excuse me, but I am," replied Bridges. "I'm Cornet Bridges, and I'm the Commander-in-Chief, and Military Storekeeper at the Tower, and Accountant-General at the War-Office, and—"

"Just hold your row, then, will you, Aecountant-General, &c., &c.," interrupted Agnes, sitting down, "and go and get me something iced."

"The usual thing, as we say at Kate's?" inquired Bridges.

"If it's good."

"Some of the best in London," said a voice at her elbow. It was Charley Dicks; with him, as they have it in Westminster Hall, Mr. Warner. He was rather pale, as if from some debauch from which he had scarcely yet recovered.

"Oh ! it's you, Charley," exclaimed Agnes.

"May I introduce my friend, Mr. Warner?" said Mr. Dicks.

Agnes gave the young man anything but a gracious reception. It was more like a supercilious nod, and then she looked at him from head to foot, as if taking stock of him and criticizing him. This caused Cumberland infinite amusement. Her con-

summate effrontery pleased him. As if ignoring St. John Warner's presence altogether, she turned to Cumberland, and exclaimed, "What were you saying?"

"I was only going to remark that I find it awfully jolly to get back to the old country, after being away such a long time."

"So I should think," replied Agnes, simulating an interest in his remark which she was far from feeling. In reality, she was looking at Warner through the lashes of her eyes, and at that moment he formed an edifying study. He was playing with his opera hat, evidently wishing to speak, but either not knowing how to edge a word in, or else having nothing to say. It was not Agnes' intention to take compassion upon him just yet; but still she did not wish to make him look too ridiculous before the men she was talking to. She knew very well that ridicule is fatal to love, and wisely forbore to use so potent a weapon when she could derive no substantial benefit from putting it in motion. Bridges returned with the Moselle, which he handed her in a silver cup of exquisite workmanship. Agnes drank some of its contents, and with a sweet smile, handed it to Warner, saying, "Will you hold this for me a little while?"

"All right!" he replied in a somewhat gruff voice.

"Oh, what a bear!" thought Agnes. "Shan't I have to tame him! Why it's worth two or three thousand a year to have a man like that always at your heels. Perhaps he'll develope, though, after a bit. I hope he will. I have known young fellows who

were the biggest fools going at first, turn out very well in the end, after they've been about a season or two. He may be a sow's ear, and if he is, I can't make a purse out of him."

With this sage reflection, she condescended to listen to something that Bridges was saying to her. "Have you heard of the new liquor the Parliamentary swells have hit on at the Carlton?"

"No ; I don't think I have."

"Well, it's called 'Friday night,' because there's a little of everything in it. You know in the House on Fridays everybody speaks about everything. Layard has a go in at his Nineveh Bulls, and Trelawney says a word or two about church rates, and Berkeley moves for leave about the Ballot ; and somebody wants to know why a nigger was killed by a mad dog on the south coast of Africa ; and another fellow asks why Cobden said Delane wears a mask, and Disraeli asks why the Irish are so shamefully neglected, when they're the finest peasantry, and all that ; and one man wants the Yankees thrashed ; another says the Poles ought to be helped, and another bullies Palmerston for not sending an army to Schleswig. Gladstone wants the House to go into Supply ; and some independent member asks to be informed whether it is actually matter of fact that a private soldier was seen wearing a cocked hat outside the Knightsbridge barracks on the 11th ult., and if so, why so, and will feel obliged by the paper being laid upon the table."

Agnes could not help laughing at this ludicrous

picture, and replied, "I suppose this new cup is not very tempting?"

"Horrid muck!" exclaimed Warner, venturing to speak for the first time.

"Oh! indeed," said Agnes, coldly. "I should not have thought you had an opportunity of judging."

"Yes, I have. I know lots of fellows at the Carlton, and some in the House. I dined there with my brother-in-law last night."

"Where?" asked Agnes. "You really don't seem to be very clear in your ideas. Do you mean the Carlton or the House of Commons?"

"Why, the Carlton, of course, and I had some of the cup. They put a lot of things in it, champagne, soda and brandy, and Burgundy, and ever so many things besides."

"Really!" ejaculated Agnes, elevating her eyebrows.

Now Warner had broken the ice, he seemed inclined to go on talking, much to the amusement of Bridges, who expected to see him verbally spiked: but Agnes let him down very easily; as she said, "It was no good breaking a fly on the wheel."

"Where are you going to-morrow?" asked Warner of Agnes. "I'll drive you out, if you'll come."

"You are very kind, I'm sure," she replied. "You've a drag, I suppose?"

"No, I haven't; but I mean to when I'm of age."

"We'll wait till then, I think," said Agnes, with a provoking smile.

"You will wait six months."

"Oh! that's not long. I dare say some one will

take me out in a drag before that. Couldn't you borrow one, don't you think?"

"I've got a decent sort of trap enough," replied Warner. "I don't think you'll object to it when you see it. At any rate, don't condemn it unseen."

"Come," thought Agnes, "that's better. They say a woman's the best civilizer you can find."

"I am just going to take a peep in the next room," exclaimed Bridges. "Shall you be here when I come back?"

"Oh! I am sure to wait for you," replied Agnes, sarcastically.

"I shan't go, then."

"I wouldn't, if I were you."

"Yes, I will, by Jove," he replied.

Cumberland accompanied him. Agnes knew perfectly well what he meant by taking a peep in the next room. Charley Dicks' hospitable mansion was nothing better than a private gambling-house, a species of diminutive Crockford's. It was only known to a certain set of men, and no one was admitted with whom the proprietor was not personally acquainted. He always made a point of being introduced some days beforehand, so that he might discover all about the man's antecedents, who he was, what he was, and what his means and resources were. Hazard was the principal game, and large sums were nightly lost. When Warner found himself alone with Agnes, he said, "May I come and sit down by you?"

"Yes, if you like," she replied. "Come along, little man."

" You don't seem to like me," he said.

" Oh! I don't know," she answered, with a shrug of the shoulders. " I think you are a decent sort of cad."

" For God's sake!" said Warner, " call me anything but that ; say I'm a thundering out-and-out cad, but don't say I'm a decent thing in cads. I can't stand that."

Agnes looked up smilingly in his face ; their eyes met. His, unable to withstand the brilliancy of hers, wandered to her lovely hair, against which the waves of light rippled, and coming in contact with the gold-dust she had not neglected to employ in order to heighten her already almost peerless attractions, recoiled splintered into a thousand minute rays. " Why have you neglected that young lady over there ?" she said.

" Which one ?"

" The one you were talking to when you came over to me."

" Oh ! she's nothing to me."

" But is it not very rude of you ? See how disconsolate she looks."

" I would much rather stay and talk to you," he replied. " I have taken quite a fancy to you, if you don't mind my saying so."

" I ? not at all," said Agnes ; " only I hate flattery."

" I do not flatter you in telling you that you are beautiful," rejoined Warner, rapturously. " That you are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen !"

"That's not saying much I should think,"
laughed Agnes.

"Why not?"

"Because you cannot have had much chance of
seeing pretty women. You are only a boy."

"I don't think that," said Warner, a little
chagrined. "I'm from a county where there are
more pretty girls than in any other in England."

"Where is that?"

"Kent," he replied.

"Well, if you prefer them to me, you can go back
to them."

"But I assure you I don't."

This was how St. John Warner began to make
love.

CHAPTER VII.

MUSIC HATH CHARMS.

HORACE ST. JOHN WARNER speedily became a lovesick Romeo, and if he did not actually serenade the mistress of his heart, he inundated her with presents of a costly and valuable description. Everything in that quarter progressed as satisfactorily as Mr. Charles Dieks could wish. Warner was fascinated, and could not feel happy unless in the society of Agnes Willoughby. It was only the story of love at first sight over again. No one could blame the young man for falling in love with a beautiful woman who deserved all the admiration that was bestowed upon her. He was in the habit of visiting her daily at her own house, and each time he saw her he fell more desperately in love than before. In a short while she had him completely under her control, and he did nothing without her sanction and permission. One day she expressed a wish to have some diamonds. She was going to the opera, and she thought they would become her. He at once drove her in his phaeton to a celebrated jeweller's near Hanover Square, and told her to select what she wanted. The jeweller knew him well, and did not hesitate to trust him on receiving his note of hand for the amount of the credit he gave him. Agnes chose jewels to the value of between two and three thousand pounds,

but that did not satisfy Warner. He told her while she was about it to have everything she wanted. The result of which permission was that St. John Warner left the diamond merchant's poorer by ten thousand pounds than when he entered it. Agnes' mental comment on the excessive liberality of her lover was characteristic, if slightly ungrateful. She said to herself, "What people say of him must be true. He can't be quite right, or he wouldn't go and give a woman ten thousand pounds worth of diamonds. There isn't another man in London who would have done such a thing. He must be a little odd."

As his oddity was beneficial to her, she did not make any objection to its being carried to its most extravagant limits. On the evening of the day on which St. John Warner had bought her the precious stones, she dressed herself, and looked almost royal in all the dazzling splendour of her beauty and her jewels, a striking and irresistible combination. It was her intention to go to the opera. The ticket for a box reposed in her eard-case. She went unaccompanied and took possession of her box—one close to the stage—without being troubled with the company of any one. Had Warner known her intention he would have given her little or no peace all the evening. A celebrated Italian artist was to sing; he was a popular favourite owing to his magnificent qualities as a performer of Italian opera. His name was Milani. Agnes evidently had some motive for wishing to be undisturbed, for she usually took a pleasure in being

surrounded by men who paid her delicate attentions and conversed agreeably—for even an opera becomes tedious at times, and requires something to help it out. The overture was played. The foot-lights turned on full, the curtain rose, and the opera began. A crowd of peasants descending by a rocky pass inundated the stage, and looking at one another in an unmeaning manner peculiar to the Thespian peasant, commenced a swelling chorus, at the expiration of which two men advanced to the front, and began to talk to one another in very choice Italian. When this was over the peasants retired behind the wings, and were for the present lost to sight. Perhaps they went to change their attire. The exigencies of the stage sometimes require peasants to come on as banditti, and the latter have to give place to armed men, while pirates are not at all uncommon. There was a pause. The lights were turned half down; a sombre shade descended over the scene. Slow music ensued, amidst which a handsome foreigner was seen coming down the rocky pass. A moody air sat on his classic brow, and there was a slightly irritable expression about his face, as if his hat did not fit him. Directly he made his appearance the house went into a furor of applause. Their approbation was loud and long, and even ladies' lips lisped "brava" in an undertone. When the acclamation had a little subsided, the thoughtful personage bowed his acknowledgments, and the notes went trilling forth from his lips like musical pearls. It was Milant. With his keen eye he took one rapid sweeping glance around the

house, and his eyes settled upon the box in which Agnes was sitting blazing with diamonds and radiant with beauty, such as only English girls can produce. His glance rested there with a gratified expression. Their eyes met, and Agnes returned the great Milani's look with one so impassioned, so fervid, so glowing, that it betrayed her secret on the instant. He caught the full expression of it; his face lighted up with pleasure, and fixing his regards upon her box, he exerted himself to the utmost and surpassed all his former efforts in the realm of song. Agnes sat entranced, drinking in with thirsty ear the sweet and dulcet tones of a voice which to her was all the world. Any one who marked her manner during the evening, who watched her well, and noted how she held her breath when his voice ran up to its full and glorious diapason, respiring only when an echo more full and sounding than its predecessors, drove them all before it, could not have failed to guess at the deep and profound passion she entertained for the illustrious prince of song. And so the evening passed. The opera was over, the ballet about to commence. But Agnes did not leave her *loge*. Was she waiting for some one? Possibly. In ten minutes the box-keeper opened the door and admitted a tall man, with a dark, almost swarthy complexion, but possessed of full, lustrous, piercing black eyes, from which less fiery orbs shrank in terror and amazement. This was Milani. Without a word of recognition or of greeting he approached her and said fiercely, "Those diamonds—from whom did they come?"

Agnes looked abashed, and replied, in a timid voice, "I thought you would like them."

"No prevarication," he continued; "I must know."

She did not speak.

Taking a chair and ensconcing himself in a dark part of the box, he seized her wrist and crushed a marvellously fine bracelet into her tender skin. She writhed with the pain, but never offered a word of remonstrance or reproach.

"You shall tell me before I leave you," he exclaimed between his teeth. Like all his countrymen he was jealous and revengeful, a very tyrant over those whose affections were so warped and biassed as to put them in his power.

"Leave go my wrist and you shall know," replied Agnes, who would have burst into a flood of scalding bitter tears had her pride allowed her. She could not bear ill-treatment from Milani. He of all others, she thought, should treat her with kindness and forbearance. But he—he looked upon her love for him as a tribute to his genius, and thanked her not for it.

He released her wrist from his tenacious and revengeful grip, and she held it, all bruised and bleeding as it was, to the light. She could not help thinking that she knew some one who would have felt enchanted had he been permitted to kiss away the traces of such rough and cowardly usage. But affairs of the heart are not under the control of reason; had they been so, she would never have been the slave of Milani.

" Speak," he exclaimed impatiently.

" They were given me by a mere boy who has taken a fancy to me," she said.

" He is not the first," replied the Italian, with bitter emphasis and cruel meaning.

" Oh, this is unkind," sobbed Agnes, leaning further back in the box so as to escape observation. " Why am I ever to have my past life cast in my teeth by you? No one else would dare to say such things to me as you do."

" Dare!" he repeated. " What is there I dare not do? You say your past life," he resumed, after a pause; " why not add to it your present?"

" Oh, oh," cried Agnes, the tears streaming down her cheeks; " this man will kill me!"

He looked on at her grief without the least sign of pity in his face. He was pitiless. His heart was as a stone, his nature as marble.

At last she succeeded in checking her passionate outburst.

" I have heard of this young man," exclaimed Milani; " he is soft here," he added, touching his forehead. " Indeed he must be so. Why, those diamonds are the dowry of a princess."

" They are yours if you fancy them," said Agnes, eagerly looking up and forgiving him all his cruelty of the moment before.

I wonder if the Italian thought of our English saying about a woman, a dog, and a walnut tree. He had full grounds for repeating the couplet.

" Why should I fancy your jewels?" he exclaimed with an impatient air. " Have I not enough of my

own? I am satiated with everything—with applause, with wealth, with love."

"I know other women love you. How can they help it?" said Agnes, beginning to cry afresh. "But you need not tell *me* of it. Oh, why do you not kill me at once? It would be preferable to this continued ill-treatment."

"You are very beautiful, my Agnes," said Milani, experiencing a revulsion of feeling or else conquered by Agnes's exquisite loveliness, which was heightened by her sorrowful demeanour.

"Am I?" she said, smiling through her tears. The smallest word, look, or act, if it were of kindness, was like the Balm of Gilead to her.

He appeared to be getting into a good humour again. "Did I sing well to-night, sorecietto?" he inquired.

"Well! oh yes, grandly; I never heard you sing better."

"So they have been telling me. But what do I care? I know that I sing well."

Agnes' face glowed with the admiration she entertained for his unquestionable talent.

"Milani," said Agnes, "I had my fortune told a short time ago, and what do you think the astrologer predicted?"

"How should I tell?"

"He said that I should marry soon."

The Italian started as if an arrow was quivering in his flesh. "Ah!" he exclaimed.

"I wonder who the lucky individual is to be," she continued playfully.

"Who will marry you?" he exclaimed, coarsely.
"You English have your prejudices."

Agnes became enraged at the pertinacity with which he returned to this theme. "You shall not keep on talking to me like that. I will not bear it from any man living."

"As you please," he coolly replied, shrugging his shoulders.

"I wish I had never, never seen you," said Agnes, vehemently.

"It is done, cara," he replied; "wishes are vain with regard to the past."

"You will drive me mad if you are so unkind."

"In that case the astrologer will have told you lies," returned Milani.

"Why, Milani? Why do you not make me your wife?" said Agnes in a soft, tremulous tone.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed. "So it has come to that at last, has it? I have expected it."

"Well, why not?"

"Simply because we don't mix a wine of price with the *vin ordinaire* of the *bourgeoisie*."

"You mean to tell me," said Agnes, clenching her hands tightly together, "that I am not good enough for you."

The Italian bared his arm nearly up to the elbow, and compressing the flesh together, showed Agnes a blue swollen vein, through which the blood was swiftly coursing.

She gazed at this singular action with wrapt attention. "That," he said, "is the blood of princes."

He regarded it proudly, and the tone in which he spoke was overbearing.

"Well?" said Agnes, quietly.

Her laconicism displeased him. He had expected her to be struck with awe at the declaration he had just made.

"Well," he repeated; "what more would you have? Is it not an answer?"

Agnes never felt herself so humiliated before. She positively hated herself for cherishing a passion for a man who could treat her in the way Milan gloried in. Rising from her chair with the haughtiest expression she could summon to her assistance—her face pale, her lips livid with rage, the traces of tears on her cheeks—she drew her opera cloak over her white and delicate shoulders, and without a word of good-bye swept majestically past him through the box into the corridor, and was presently standing shivering upon the staircase, waiting for her brougham to arrive. As she was returning home that night her reflections were very bitter. To be ridiculed and repudiated by a man upon whom she had centred all her affections, with no other result than to have them thrust back upon her with something resembling ignominy and disdain, was a blow she felt acutely.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, in a tone of concentrated resentment, "I will show him what I can do! If he despises me there are others who will lead me to the altar, and think themselves only too happy in being permitted to do so."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WINDHAM ARMS.

VERY naturally indignation of the strongest kind was excited in Agnes's breast against the selfish Italian, whose outspoken manner was anything but pleasant to her womanly feelings. He had declared his intentions respecting her with a coarseness that no gentleman, English or foreign, would have permitted himself to make use of, even to the commonest woman who picks up a precarious livelihood in the streets. Although Agnes was on very good terms with herself, she had a feeling that she was not so immaculate as some other of her country-women. She never blamed herself very severely for her offences against the standard of morality which society has set up for its protection, for she considered that the accident of birth and a thousand other fortuitous occurrences shaped one's destiny. If, for instance, she had been born the daughter of a country gentleman, or the only child of a peer of the realm, it is fair to presume that she would not now have been the cynosure of all eyes whenever she made her appearance in those places where all who have the slightest pretensions to be considered fashionable love to congregate. It was simply Robert Owen's theory over again ; but when the man upon whom she had lavished an amount of de-

votion—it made her turn pale to think of—repudiated her, and told her in unmistakable language that she was honoured by his notice, she felt the inconvenience of her position keenly. Try how she would, she could not bring herself to understand in what the famous signor was honouring her by condescending to allow his regards to fix themselves upon her in fugitive moments when they were not more agreeably employed. And yet she loved this man. Strange inconsistency, inexplicable mystery, the nature of woman will ever be contradictory—she cannot be said to have any character. A thorough creature of impulse, she is swayed like a feather, this way and that, just as the wind may happen to blow. Milani, by his conduct, which deserved a harsher epithet than unkind, had forfeited all claim to her regard, and yet she could not summon up sufficient courage to blot him out from her memory and dismiss him from her thoughts. It would have been better for her if she had been able to do so. She would have given worlds to have humbled his proud spirit, to have compelled him to fall at her feet and ask her forgiveness for his many irritating speeches, and demand her pardon for the pertinacity with which he referred to a career which had she never adopted, would not have led her in contact with him. She would have freely rendered all her worldly possessions to any kindly-disposed magician who should have so worked his spells, and ordered his charms, as to make the accomplished Milani sue for *her* love as she had *sought* for *his*. It is a humiliating reflection for a woman

to think that she is not estimated at her real value by a man whose affection and opinion she cares about. Milani's treatment of her had made her hate herself, and had caused her to become dissatisfied with everything and everybody. In the privacy of her own apartment she communed with herself, exclaiming aloud, in the anguish of her spirit, "I wonder what there is in me which prevents him from liking me, from loving me as I love him. I know I am beautiful. I do not say so from a feeling of vanity, or because hundreds of men have told me so ; I have only to look at my hair to see that I have at least one good point about me ; and yet, though I have made myself contemptible in my own eyes by the way in which I have gone after that man, and almost thrown myself into his arms, as it were, he rejects my love, and treats me with contumely and contempt. Oh ! I must be mean-spirited not to meet scorn with scorn, and pay him back again in his own coin. It is not as if I were dependent upon his favour and his notice for my existence ; I know many men who would not be seen with him in the street : if he is a celebrated singer he is not everybody ; people in his position are not thought much of ; they are made a fuss over in the papers, and taken up by two or three swells who want to be Mecœnases, and shown off at soirées, as Du Chaillu, or Speke and Grant, or any other fellow who has done something is ; but they are hardly worth a thought in reality : as long as their voice lasts, they make a little money, and get their names up, and ther they are so confoundedly stuck

up that they really don't know where their head stands. I should like to see that fellow taken down by somebody somehow or other: he has treated me shamefully. I never can and I never will forget it or forgive him for it. If he were to come to me on his bended knees, and ask me to love him as I did before, I wouldn't do it. If he went through all sorts of penances it wouldn't make the least bit of difference; and yet, when I go to the opera and hear him sing, all the old feeling of fondness comes back, and I am as much his slave as ever again. Oh, what would I not give to be free from this infatuation! I know very well, for I am not a fool, that after what he said last night, my running after him can never be productive of any good to me, and in spite of this, I cannot help wishing that he would make me his wife."

Agnes would, however, recal this wish almost as soon as she had uttered it, saying, "I must be stupid to wish that, for if he treat me as he does now, what have I to expect if he married me? It would be like hell upon earth, and the happiness of being his, of knowing that he was *mine*, would be dearly bought at the price I should have to pay for it."

The day after her interview with Milani, a servant brought her a note—the handwriting was familiar to her, and she tore it open with precipitation. It was as brief as it was abrupt; hastily written, were these words—

" You must not come to the opera again with

the expeetation that I shall enter your *loge*. I do not wish to talk any more to you ; *vous m'ennuyez*.

"MILANI."

This letter put Agnes into an uncontrollable passion. "He does not want to see me !" she cried ; "the brute ! I could kill him. But it just serves me right for having anything to do with a beastly foreigner. I have heard women say lots of times that they hated Frenchmen and Italians, and all that lot. The only ones worth speaking to are the *attachés* at the Embassy. I have made up my mind, though, that he shall repent this. If I have not had any pluek before, I will summon some now. I'll make him come to me. I go to the opera to see him again ! not I ; if I do I wish I may drop down dead on the floor of the entry. He shall eome to me next time we meet, I swear he shall, or else we shall remain separated for ever. He is a eowardly monster, and I hate him. Does he think I have no spirit in me, or that beeause I was not born a lady I haven't any pride ? Fancy the cad talking to me about his prince's blood ; I would not give a farthing a bucket for it. I wish he would get a cold or something which would make his voicee go, he'd be glad enough to see me or anybody else then who would speak to him, I'll bet. The idea of his talking to me as he has done ! But I'll let him know lie mustn't make any mistake about me, the cold, eyneial, sneering beast. Oh ! how I hate him. I positively detest that man ! I wonder how I ever could have liked

'him. Well, I suppose I am not the first woman who has made a fool of herself. There's one consolation, and that is, it is not too late to rectify the error."

A knock at the door cut her lucubration short, and to her relief St. John Warner soon afterwards was announced. "Shall I show him in the drawing-room, mum ?" asked Wilkins.

"No," replied Agnes ; "it's so jolly cold to-day, let him come in here."

So Warner was ushered into the little boudoir in which she breakfasted.

"Good morning, how are you ?" he exclaimed. "I know it's a very odd time for a fellow to call, but I wanted you to come out somewhere, and I know you generally have such an awful lot of engagements, that I thought it would be advisable to come early and be the first in the field. I had the devil's own work though to get myself up. I've got a sleepy beggar of a servant, and he's no good at all for waking you. I generally wake about six, only I don't see the fun of turning out quite so soon as that. I like the sleep one gets between six and nine. I always think it the best, because you know it's the sort of thing you oughtn't to do. It's like the sluggard and Dr. Watts, and you want to slumber again and all that sort of thing, don't you see ? There is a kind of wicked pleasure about lying in bed in the morning, the effect of which is heightened by your expecting your man to come in every moment, that is, if you happen to be in a sort of half-doze, neither one thing nor t'other

Sometimes very much t'other. Now, I thought it wouldn't be half a bad dodge to have a hole made in the ceiling through which I could put a bit of string. You see my man sleeps in the pantry just below my bedroom, and so I had the hole made, put the string through and told him to tie it on to one of his toes when he went to bed, so that I could have a d----d good pull at it when I woke at six, which would just give me time to have my snooze before he could come with the hot water. He said he'd do it, and of course I thought he would. Well, this morning I woke as usual, and began to tug away at the cord like blazes. I thought it was beastly odd, because the string never gave a bit. It was like pulling at your line when you've caught a sunken log instead of a perch. Perhaps the poor beggar's holding on to his leg, I thought, and after giving it a parting jerk, I turned over and went to by-bye again. I never stirred again till about eight, and not finding any water I tumbled into my slippers and dressing-gown, and went downstairs to see what the reason was. I said to myself, I pulled hard enough, I'll swear, to pull the fellow's toe off! When I got down I kicked his door open, and I'll be hanged if I didn't find the string tied hard and fast to the bed-post, and the lazy beast lying on his back fast asleep, snoring like anything. D---- his eyes, I said, and laying hold of the pillow I walloped him with it till he couldn't see. 'You'll sell me again, will you?' I said to him. But he promised very submissively that if I'd leave off whacking him he wouldn't do it

again. So I left off. But you must admit the fellow deserved the welting I gave him."

Agnes laughed, and said, "I'm glad you've come, you are rather good fun, you know, and I happen to be in a frightful state of temper, so I advise you not to offend me, because if you do you'll get it."

"All right. Will you come out? that'll set you on your legs again as soon as anything."

"Think so?" she exclaimed.

"I know it will. I've got up in the morning, after a bout with the dice at Charley Dicks's good for nothing almost, couldn't hold the razor to shave with, 'bliged to get a man to come in and do it for me. Hate that; beggars almost always cut you; and when I've had some rum and milk just to give a tone to the stomach, and a couple of eggs beaten up in some port wine afterwards, by way of breakfast, I've had the trap out and made myself right as a sixpence."

It was remarkable that Warner since he had known Agnes had become less bashful when in her society, and could show himself in his true colours, which were not so objectionable as she had imagined in the first days of their intercourse.

"What sort of a turnout have you?" asked Agnes.

"You can see it outside."

"Is it here?"

"Yes. I drove over in it," replied Warner.

"Is it your own?"

"No; it is not. I hired it."

Agnes went to the window and looked out. It was a mail phaeton, but an ill-looking affair, neither creditable to the maker or the driver. It was snuff-coloured, and appeared dirty and old-fashioned. Agnes retired from her point of vantage in great disgust.

"What do you think of it?" inquired Warner.

"If that is the best you have to take me out in I shall stop at home," she replied. Adding as she warmed with her subject, "It's the mangiest concern I ever saw in my life. Where did you pick it up? Who swindled you into buying it? That's one of Charley Dicks's games, I'll lay a sovereign. What did he charge you for it?"

"You are not far wrong," replied Warner. "Charley Dicks sold it me. He said it was first-chop, and I gave him five hundred guineas for it with the horses."

"I suppose he thought he'd got hold of a flat, and didn't see why he shouldn't make hay while the sun was skining. But I tell you plainly I wont go out in such a thing, so you need not flatter yourself. If you like to go to some place and get a decent trap I'll go. The horses will do. I like the look of them; they are the right sort. But as for the phaeton I wouldn't give that for it," she added, snapping her fingers.

"I am very sorry I'm sure," said Warner, "that I should have asked you to go out in anything that you have so strong an objection to. I thought the phaeton was not as good as it might or ought to be. I can soon change it"

"Well, you go and do the best you can, and I'll wait in two or three hours for you," replied Agnes. "Get something smart and handsome-looking, with lamps, and your monogram on it. But you won't have time for that. Anyhow, get something a lady can be seen in."

"All right," answered Warner, putting on his hat. "I shan't be long."

He obeyed her commands to the letter. He had not time to buy one; but he drove the old one to the stables and hired a very handsome phaeton, which was nearly new, and which the livery-stable keeper had in reality no right to let out, as it belonged to a customer of his, who had given it into his charge during his absence from town.

Agnes was graciously pleased to approve of this, and compliment her preux chevalier on his good taste in selecting a carriage in every way corresponding to what she wished for.

"Are you sure you can drive?" she asked, as if some doubt upon the matter existed in her mind.
"Because I have no particular wish to break my neck, or have it broken for me."

"Don't be alarmed," he replied. "Driving traps and engines is about the only thing I can do well."

"Engines! steam-engines?"

"Yes," he said.

"You do not mean to say you have been in the stoker line?"

"No. But I have a fancy for it."

"Oh! I see. I thought at first you meant you

had been hard up, and had gone on some railway as a stoker. I knew two or three very nice fellows when I was first of all about town, who came to great grief and enlisted. One fellow, Lord South, enlisted in the Blues, and two others went into the Royal Artillery. I was sorry for South, he was such a nice fellow, and it was all through me that he went to the bad. And yet I can't blame myself for it exactly. I certainly did go ahead when I was living with him, I admit that most freely. But the man never told me how much money he'd got, and when I found that he had outrun the constable, no one was more surprised than I was."

"He should have pulled up," said Warner.

"Ah ! it's all very well to say that. But he didn't do it," replied Agnes, carried away by the reminiscence of the vicissitudes of her old friend, who rejoiced in the euphonious title of Lord South.

"What's become of him now ?" asked Warner.

"God knows !" she replied. "I think some one told me he died somewhere. After he did for himself by enlisting I never saw anything more of him. Why, it wasn't likely that I should take any interest in him after that. What possible use could he be to any one ? I wasn't going to waste my time in trapesing about after a full private. No one could expect such a thing."

What a satire was this upon the ephemeral connexions that men form with women who have only their butterfly character and their flower-like beauty to recommend them ! Agnes knew that Lord

South would leave her when it suited him. He, on his part, no doubt felt that he was making a convenience of her for a short time, so there was not much love lost between them. He had enlisted in the Blues when his money was unable to supply his extravagances, and perhaps with the dread of arrest before his eyes. And then, even then, Agnes was not expected to waste her time in running after him—

“A woman ruined him, and he went
The way that fools are always sent.”

In the evening, after they had returned from their drive, Agnes dined with Warner at Long's. She was listlessly sipping a glass of wine, when her companion said—

“Will you come somewhere?”
“I don't care,” she replied.
“Well, come to a crib I very often patronize.”
“Where is it? What is it called?”
“Do you know Barnes's?” he said.
“I should think I did. It is not much of a place.”

“Oh! I don't know. It is very good fun sometimes. Let us turn in there for an hour. You can go where you like afterwards.”

Agnes acquiesced in this proposition, and they were soon rattling along in a hansom towards the Haymarket. That locality has been christened by some divine of an inventive faculty—“The Devil's Acre.” The baptism is renewed in copious libations every night, and it is certainly a most fertile piece of ground for the arch-fiend to work upon.

It must return him a hundred-fold. No thorns spring up to choke his sowing. The growth is rank and luxuriant. Everything comes to maturity and perfection with tropical celerity, and a plentiful harvest rewards the labour of Satan and his subordinates. The cab stopped about halfway down, and permitted its occupants to alight. They crossed the pavement, and passing through a small court, pushed open a door, descended a couple of steps, and found themselves in a spacious apartment, brilliantly lighted, and containing several specimens of frail femininity, a sprinkling of lawyers' clerks, who had gone in there to get a glass of ale before going to "The Holborn," and they thought it the thing to take a look at the 'market; a commercial traveller or two, with their unmistakable countenances, strongly indicative of £ s. d. and five per cent. commission; an occasional shop-boy; a counter-jumper passing away the time which had to elapse before his presence would be again required under his master's roof, where he was expected to repose in peace, quietness and unsullied virtue as the hour struck eleven. If the company was not very select, it was noisy. Agnes looked around her, and not exactly liking the prospect before her, said—

"I shall go to the Argyll. You can come and fetch me when you are tired of being here."

"Wont you stop?" he asked.

"No! I don't see it." And away she walked.

St. John Warner appeared disappointed at her leaving him so abruptly. Just as she reached the door she heard a voice exclaim—

"Going already?"

It was the son of the proprietor of the establishment, a good-natured looking man, with whom both Agnes and Warner were well acquainted, especially the latter.

"Yes; I'm going to the Argyll."

"You might stop five minutes for the good of the house."

"She'll stop and talk to you, Teddy," said Warner, "if you ask her."

"What will you stand if I stay?" said Agnes.

"I'll toss Mr. Warner for half a dozen of champagne."

The luck was against Warner, and the champagne made its appearance. Agnes drank a glass or two, and then carried out her original intention of going to the Terpsichorean assembly called the Argyll Rooms.

The apartment in which Warner was had a distinctive appellation. The bar facing the thoroughfare, if the sign went for anything, appertained to the "Grapes;" but the bar in the rear, which was divided from the other by a partition, was dignified by the name of the "Windham Arms." The letters composing this were handsomely emblazoned upon a board which was suspended just over the bar, so that all those who ran could read it. After imbibing a considerable quantity of wine, Warner had an idea that it was incumbent upon him to do something. So, by way of making himself useful, he went behind the bar and officiated in the capacity of barman, much to the delight of an appreciative bevy of young ladies, who, from their peripatetic

tendencies, may not inaptly be described as wandering damsels. It would be as presumptuous as futile to endeavour to calculate how many quarts and gallons of various stimulants were drawn and dispensed to the public by the spirited amateur who so well deserved the thanks of the community. But mankind are proverbially ungrateful, and Mr. Warner, notwithstanding his disinterested enthusiasm, received more sarcastic remarks than thanks. When he set the pots of foaming liquor down, he might have been mistaken for a bondsman catering for the Gods ; only Ganymede would have required a different species of divinity than that to which Horace St. John Warner was ministering.

CHAPTER IX.

WARNER DRUNK.

AGNES found various admirers at the place to which she had betaken herself, who were infinitely more agreeable and companionable than Warner ; but it must be admitted that she was slightly disappointed at not finding that young gentleman waiting for her downstairs. She had expected his appearance in the gallery for some time. But, knowing his eccentricities, she thought he had perhaps fallen in with some official connected with the place, with whom he was drinking on the familiar terms on which he usually put himself with those inferior to him in birth, fortune, and position. Agnes was accustomed to think that Mr. Warner's moral sense was a little blunted ; but one thing was certain, he did not care about asserting his position as a gentleman, and she knew that he was making a mistake which has ruined scores of promising young men—committing an error which it is difficult in after life to repair.

"Can I see you to your brougham ?" exclaimed some one she was talking to.

"No, thanks !" she replied. "But you can come as far as Barnes's with me. I expect to meet some one I know."

He was a young man not very well versed in the

usages of society to which the epithet polite does not strictly speaking properly apply, and so he said he should feel much pleasure in so doing. Perhaps an old stager would have thought that it was a curt request, and have mentally observed that he did not care about providing women for other people. But Agnes Willoughby was the belle of the room, and he felt flattered at her giving him permission to offer her his arm, if only for a short walk from one street to another. And yet he was a man of good family. There is an old saying that it—

“Is something to be a queen,
Although in Aberdeen.”

It was a little after twelve when they reached Barnes's, and they found that illustrious, well-conducted and orderly hostelry considerably crowded. If I were to say that the strictest decorum prevailed amongst either the feminine or the masculine part of the community, I should be travelling very wide of the mark : cheeks were flushed, eyes swollen and heavy, hands tremulous, and men and women, in many cases, drinking more than was good for them. If the conversation, which was fast and furious, was not of the character which would grace the drawing-rooms of May Fair, it was not the fault of the spirited proprietor ; his mission was not to proselytize his customers, but to make money out of them ; and had he in a moment of chivalrous devotion to the R.T.S. undertaken to distribute a few hundreds of those famous tracts entitled “Fanny Hill,” or the “Penitent Profligate,” he would in

many cases have been casting his pearls before swine, and wasting his charitable sweetness upon the desert air. As Agnes passed in at the side-door, the door-porter, a diminutive abortion, with a shock head of hair and a poverty-stricken appearance, whom it much delighted his patrons and patronesses to call Patsy, addressing her, said—

“Mr. Warner he’s a going it, mum.”

“The fool,” muttered Agnes; “I wonder what he’s doing now.”

She was not long in finding out. He was standing upon a chair, haranguing the multitude with the assistance of all the drunken eloquence he could command. Close to him, applauding him vehemently, were two men: they were sufficiently remarkable to merit a little description. The first was a very tall man, at least seven feet high; his face was battered about, here and there, as if he had gone through more than one pugilistic encounter, in which, if he did carry off the palm, the man he conquered gave him a few affectionate taps by which he was able to call the circumstance to mind whenever he took a good look at himself in a glass. He was known as the Birmingham Giant. His strength was prodigious; he could perform marvels and prodigies with his arms, and was looked upon as a sort of Thor in the vicinity of his birth, where physical prowess and fistic acquirements are often not useful only, but essential. The other bottle-holder of Mr. Warner was a man whose skin was decidedly tawny; ill-natured people would

have called it black, and denominated him a nigger, but he was in reality a half-caste of a fine, healthy-looking chocolate colour, the appearance of which made you feel inclined to rush up to him with a knife and cut off a bit of him in mistake for the soluble material which is so much admired for breakfast. His lips to our northern eyes were not pretty, but maybe in his own country they were esteemed a mark of great beauty ; his hair was obstinately inclined to curl very much after the fashion of the horsehair on a barrister's wig, and it rolled itself into a fine woolly consistency of which a Zulu Kaffir would have been justly proud ; the opaqueness of his hands enabled their fortunate possessor to dispense with gloves, always an expensive article of wearing apparel. He was dressed in a fashionable manner, and smoked a very tolerable cigar with a grace peculiar to himself. His appellation was Kangaroo —derivation unknown. He certainly bore no resemblance to that highly elastic-footed animal, nor was his person ornamented with a tail in the manner of beasts of the field and fiends who go about seeking whom they may devour. In stature he was tall and thin, like an animated whipping-post, and, to sum up his general characteristics, he was a favourite with most people, and reported a good friend to have about you in the event of a disturbance. Although with philosophic calmness disdaining wealth and the riches of this world, he nevertheless was not above accepting a sovereign if it were pressed upon him, and smaller sums occasionally found their way into the waistcoat-pocket

exchequer, which was usually at low water. At times money would be plentiful with him, and, while flush, he was accustomed to live in a style of great splendour; but his greatness was ephemeral, and he became speedily reduced again to the condition of all gaudy creatures who neglect the substance and go in search of the shadow. His profession was that of an interpreter. Rumour whispered that his progenitor was a mighty potentate, at once victorious and glorious, somewhat addicted to the customs of Dahomey and other neighbouring states, at which his undutiful offspring had taken a disgust, and on being requested by his father's chocolate and ebony warriors to sally forth, and, like Tamerlane, make a pyramid of skulls, he had sturdily refused to do so, having secretly made friends with a missionary, and being strictly forbidden by that worthy man to lend himself to any such iniquity. This new Moses in Egypt looked upon his father's customs as barbarous, and sailed for England, where a man is not obliged to go and kill other people for the sake of their skulls. On the flight of the youthful heir-presumptive to the throne being discovered, the puissant monarch, his father, caused the missionary to be baked alive in a huge pie-dish, and afterwards devoured in the great square in the presence of a concourse of people, by the principal nobles and other leading rulers in the kingdom. Now and then the P.M. (puissant monarch) sends his son magnificent presents of ivory, in the shape of elephant's tusks, and gold-dust and palm oil, and other productions of a naturally rich and

fertile country. With these—or rather the proceeds of these—his exiled offspring lives a life of luxury and of ease, such as it befits a prince to lead, and when the money is exhausted he throws off his purple and fine linen and becomes Kangaroo, the Interpreter. Such is the reward of virtue—such is the romance of reality in the life of one whose soul was too big for his chocolate-coloured body. Had he collected the skulls he would have been rich and powerful, his name would have rung through the land, and he would have succeeded to the government of a brave if a benighted people. But now—the picture is painful—it is the old story of merit and adversity, and yet, strange to say, Exeter Hall has not offered him its platform, nor has the Metropolitan Tabernacle condescended to notice the important fact of his existence. To this I may be permitted to append a well-worn and homely saying, which conveys a great deal in simple and unaffected language—Such is life !

I am not a writer of biography ; I have contented myself with giving a statement of unvarnished facts. Mr. Warner did not make much impression upon his audience, which somewhat resembled that which assembles in the town-hall at a Brighton election. But Gog and Magog, in the persons of Kangaroo and the Birmingham Giant, overawed those who were at all inclined to take exception at so novel a mode of courting the popularity of the masses as holding forth on a cane-bottomed chair in the backroom of a public-house in a thoroughfare notorious for its impropriety. The first stage of

drunkenness is generally loquacity, the second opens with a strong inclination to fight anybody for anything. So it is not to be wondered at that Mr. Warner, after he had exhausted the pure well of oratory undefiled, flapped his arms against his sides like a gamecock in an ecstacy at finding a grain of corn on his own dunghill, and challenged every one in the room to mortal combat. At last he sank into the arms of the Birmingham Giant, and inanely declared that he would stand something all round. After this he became decidedly puerile, and began to sing, in a feeble voice, "I'm old Bob Ridley," which popular lyric was then much in vogue. The song informs you that the hero of the story was a full-grown negro, so Mr. Warner was very much mistaken as to his identity, a fact the more to be regretted, as his individuality was too important to be merged in that of any inferior anatomy.

Agnes went up to Teddy Barnes when this unedifying exhibition was brought to a close, and exclaimed, "What a beast!"

"Shall I give him a shakedown upstairs?" he asked.

"No," she replied; "tell the Giant to put him in a cab—I'll look after him."

"All right. You know your game better than I do," said Teddy. "I'll tell the Giant."

Walking up to the latter personage, he said, "Now, Brummagem, wake up."

"What's the row, governor?" replied the Giant.

"Only this, my little Goliah; just put Mr. Knocksoftly into a cab, and wait outside till I come."

"Knocksoftly!" echoed Mr. Warner, who was very far gone; "not my name—I'm Old Bob Ridley, you know—not half a bad sort, and I'm going to drive the Holyhead and Chester Express the next time the Prince of Wales goes to Dublin."

The Giant nodded to Teddy, lifted Mr. Warner up as if he had been a truss of straw, and carried him into the street.

"He's as drunk as a fool," said Teddy, coming back to Agnes. "I've sent the Giant out with him. Shall I see you to the door?"

Agnes accepted the offer of his escort, and was soon on her way home.

"I'll teach him better," she said to herself, "if I take him in hand. He shan't make such a disgusting exhibition of himself. I hate to see a man go on drinking till he can't see. Why can't he tell when he's had enough, and leave off?"

On reaching her house, she had Warner lifted out of the cab and carried into the drawing-room, where he was deposited on the sofa.

"There he may lie," Agnes exclaimed to Wilkins; "I shall only throw a rug over him. There's that leopard's skin, get that. I brought him home because I had a particular motive for doing so; but you know, Wilkins, how I detest seeing a man in such a filthy state."

"Yes, mum, that I do, well," replied Wilkins; "and how ever gentlemen who calls themselves gentlemen, and is and acts as such, should go and forget themselves like this, is beyond my poor powers of comprehension."

"I'll give it him to-morrow," said Agnes.

"So I would, mum," rejoined Wilkins; "I'd give it him to rights. Of course it isn't for such as me to speak, but if you ask me in a friendly way like, mum, for my candid opinion. I say it's shameful, mum, shameful, and nothing else."

CHAPTER X.

WARNER SOBER.

AGNES did not trouble herself much as to how Mr. Horace St. John Warner passed the night. It was sufficient for her that she had generously given him house-room and something to lie upon. As to any discomfort he might encounter, that was his fault and his look-out. He should not have allowed himself to get intoxicated.

Before she retired to rest herself, she took a parting glance at him ; his black hair had fallen over his temples, giving him a girlish appearance. His sleep was deep and heavy, but uneasy. Now and then he muttered something aloud. Sometimes a few consecutive sentences, sometimes incoherent jargon.

While she was standing over him, he repeated part of his oration of a few hours before. A sleepy grunt heralded these exclamations :—

“ V'l'a, messieurs, v'l'a, mesdames,” he said ; “ this is the pelican of the wilderness, who whistles through his nostrils the favourite air of his native land. *Entrez donc.* Walk up, walk up. This is the chimpanzee of the wilds of Affghanistan, who carries his tender offspring into the topmost branches of the highest trees and there shaketh them shameful.

Such are the practices of parents in those uncultivated regions."

Then he relapsed again into somnolency.

"Leave the gas burning, Wilkins," said Agnes ; "because if he wakes up in the night, he may get frightened at seeing himself in a strange place, and have a fit or something. Above all things, keep the lush away from him. I don't want him to be very tight to-morrow."

Agnes now retired to bed herself, and Wilkins betook herself to the kitchen, ostensibly to do the same thing ; but the cook had invited a friend of hers to spend the evening with her, and she had prolonged her stay, and was now going to sleep with the disciple of the culinary art.

The cook and her friend were in the kitchen sitting before a comfortable fire. The friend was a woman of about five-and-thirty, with a sharp, shrewd, cunning face, and a little gone in liquor, as she would herself have said.

"Is she gone to bed ?" asked the cook, looking up to the ceiling, to intimate that she meant her mistress.

"Fast as a top in five minutes," replied the sagacious Wilkins.

"That's a blessing."

"I'm going to sleep along of cook to-night," said the friend.

"That's right," said Wilkins ; "and now let's have a little hot gin and water. Where's the bottle ?"

"In my pocket," replied the friend. "I collared

the gun (*i.e.* the bottle) when I heard the missis come back. I didn't know but what she might turn rusty, seeing a strange face, not knowing who I was, or where I come from."

The kettle was hissing pleasantly on the hob, and the three women were soon enjoying themselves in their own peculiar fashion.

"That's something like," said the friend ; "I do love to see people enjoying of themselves. I never have much of a spree at my place. My missis is a born devil. Hit me ?—ah !—and think nothing of it. Call me names ?—oh ! plenty of them. Swears like a Horseguard. I sometimes think my life aint safe ; and owing a duty to myself, my family, and my friends—youself, Miss Wilkins, and cook, here, respectfully included, though I am aware that to mention prsent company is impolite—I ought to give her a month's warning, or take a month's wages. But, lor' ! if I was to so much as open my mouth she claps a stopper on it. 'Out of my house !' she'd say—'out you go ! Haven't I raised your wages, you something of blazes ?'—(I wont offend feelings by mentioning of names)—'from thirty shillings to one pound ten ? 'So—(a lump of sugar, cook. Thank you. Yours stiff enough, Miss Wilkins ? Yes ? Glad to hear it)—so I bears it as long as it's in human nature to do so, though I am full well aware that I'm 'umbling and humiliating of myself in so doing. But some morning I shall just step it quietly, and go to a hant of mine as lives down in Silver Street, Stepney, and keeps a public-house, being much in want of a barmaid,

which is a situation I could fill well, having a natural taste to the business, and being brought up to it when a girl not higher than that table."

"That's very bad," said the cook. "I wouldn't stop, Dimah, to be treated like that."

"Oh ! it's awful, my dear—awful !" rejoined Dinah. "I haven't told you half I have to put up with. Oh ! she's a bad un. She'll frizzle some day, if so be as Mr. Satan gets his own as they parsons they tell, which I see no reason to disbelieve them, because they only go upon the Bible ; and that's true, as everybody knows, and nobody can deny. (This is very good old tom, cook ; may I venture to express a hope that theror's more where that came from !)"

The cook said there was, and the harmony of the evening flowed on undisturbed.

"Oh my !" continued Dinah, "shan't I just drop in for it to-morrow ! It'll be, You this and You that ; oh yes, it will ! She's corrupted my morals hawful ; and I wont go so far as to say that I didn't know a thing or two when I went into her service ; for, cook, here, she knows I was always pretty fly from a child up to a woman. But then, the things I've learnt lately 'ud fill a book—they would, indeed, dear. You aint got no dogs here, have you ?"

"Only one," replied Wilkins.

"Then you fall down on your knees, and thank Heaven for that, Miss Wilkins," said Dinah, solemnly and emphatically. "Dogs is all very well in a kennel, but in a house they're varmints. I'd scrag em all, I would. We've got four. Wouldn't I

like to give them a dose of arsenic or strychnine on the sly, wouldn't I, just? I'd make them turn their toes up. One of them's in the family way, and there's more fuss made over that cussed dog—I ask your pardon all round for so far to forget myself as to use bad language; but you must please lay it at missus's door—more fuss there's over that dog than over a blessed baby as aint long seen the light. I've no patience with such ways, I haven't. It's a dog terrier, and master he bought it for missus, and I hear him say he give five-and-twenty pounds for it. He got it at Walham Green, of a man called Abbott—a nice, civil-spoken man, and wonderful at breeding dogs. We go down in the broom sometimes, I carrying the dog all wrapped up in coats, as if it was a child a-going to a christening; and p'raps its eyes aint so bright as usual, or its tail don't wag, or something, and Abbott he comes out and gives it a bit of stuff that's good for it, and missus she gets out of the broom and goes into the place and has a look at all the dogs, and aint a bit afraid of a lot of great fierce-looking mastiffs and such like, no more than if they hadn't got no teeth; and she kisses them and hugs them as if fleas weren't of no account at all. For my part I can't abear the nasty things, I can't, so don't make any mistake, my dears. The mess I have at home, too! Well, I wont say anything; but we're talking friendly like, and you can guess. I'll only say I aint an ostrich, and my stomach aint lined with cast-iron any more than other people's. Don't you live in a place, my dear,

where there's dogs. Take an old pal's advice : dogs is worse than cats, and not fit to hold a candle to monkeys. I'd sooner be a keeper in the Zoological Gardens, and feed snakes and clean out tigers, than I'd slave after dogs—may I die this moment if I wouldn't!" Wilkins appeared grateful for this advice, and looked as if she were determined to follow it. In due time those who were imitating High Life Below Stairs sought their couches.

It may be guessed, without a very great tax upon the imagination, that the sun rose considerably earlier than either Agnes or St. John Warner. The latter was still fast asleep when she came down to see how he was getting on. While she was gazing at him with anything but admiration or respect, he gave a spasmodic start, and woke up. He would not have felt flattered if he had been able to interpret the expression of her face. She was saying inwardly, "I would rather see any man belonging to me brought home dead on a stretcher, than have him continually in this condition."

But happily for Mr. Warner, he was ignorant of this pious exclamation. Sitting up, he rubbed his eyes and looked stupidly around him.

"Good morning," said Agnes. "Do you feel any better after your sleep?"

As soon as he could collect his thoughts, he understood the position of affairs at once.

"I am really very sorry," he said. "I am afraid I must have fallen very much in your good opinion. I owe you a great many apologies."

"I didn't like to leave you among strangers," Agnes said, with an affectation of tenderness in her tone.

"That was very kind of you—I cannot thank you enough," he replied, feelingly.

"Oh, it is nothing. What can my servant get you?"

"I think I could manage to eat a broil, or something devilled," he said. "But, first of all, will you kindly tell them to bring me some soda and brandy?"

Agnes left the room, promising to do so.

After Warner had disposed of the effervescent draught, and consumed a slight breakfast, he laid down again. Perhaps two hours elapsed before Agnes saw him again. He was not a very entertaining object at that time for any one to look at. A man who has been out the best part of the night, riotous and tipsy, never is an inviting sight: he is stale and grizzly, unkempt and dirty. She advised him to run upstairs and sluice his face with water, and told him he would find her in her boudoir. He did so, and looked a little more Christian like, although even then he was to his natural state what a bad halfcrown is to a good one. Agnes was reclining in an arm-chair, dressed in a charming loose morning dress, looking at some sweetly pretty flowers in a stand which she had the other day brought from Covent Garden.

"I wish," he said, on entering the room, "that I had some one to look after me always in the same kind way you have done."

Agnes turned her beautiful eyes upon him, and

interrogated him with them. It was better far, and more forcible than some commonplace conversation. Like an unusually clever woman, she never spoke when silence would answer her purpose as well or better.

A sunbeam wandering about the room fell with all its filmy motes upon her glittering hair, and radiated it, making it sparkle like the threads of cloth of gold.

Finding that she did not speak, he continued, " You see a man is always steadier when he has some one to care for ; you know the old song—

" 'Something to love me, something to bless,
Something to smile upon and to caress.'

When I go into the Haymarket those fellows make a fool of me, and flatter me, and all that. Of course they don't do it for nothing ; I pay them well for it, and I am ass enough to feel pleased at it. I dare say, now, you were a good deal shocked at the way I went on last night ?"

" Oh, no ! I can make allowances," she replied, with a sarcastic smile.

There was a pause, during which St. John Warner played with the petals of a geranium, and seemed very much taken up with the study of botany all at once.

" Why don't you get a wife ?" exclaimed Agnes, in a low tone.

He looked up inquiringly ; their eyes met. Hers never flinched ; his sought the flowers again.

" What do you mean ?" he said.

"Marry somebody, my dear fellow! There are some men, like yourself, unable to withstand temptation, and who plunge into all sorts of dissipation and excess, and die, weakened, broken down, and altogether debilitated at thirty. The Earl of Rochester, in Charles the Second's time, was one of them. I could tell you a few more, only I think it folly to mention names of men you've known well. Other men are more strong-minded, and they can do without wives. But some ought always to marry."

"I'd marry to-morrow," he said, "if I could get anybody to have me."

"Plenty of people would have you," she said. "You are good looking, young, I suppose well off and well connected. I know nothing about you—I only go by my own impression of you. Lots of girls would be glad to have you."

"Ah! think so?" he replied. "I don't care about girls; I like women—some one I can talk to and take some interest in. I have only just left school myself, and don't want to have everything to teach to a chit of a girl who has not long left her mother's old dresses off."

"Oh! I see," exclaimed Agnes; "why don't you get a widow, then?"

"I shouldn't mind."

"They are as plentiful as blackberries," said Agnes. "You would have no difficulty in getting one."

"I have taken a great fancy to some one already though."

"Indeed ! who may that be ?" she inquired, as if she did not know perfectly well what he was driving at.

"I hardly like to tell you ; for I am afraid I should not have much chance of success," he said, a little confused.

And there they stood—a crisis in the fate of each approaching—the Spider and the Fly !

CHAPTER XI.

THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.

PERHAPS between twenty and twenty-one is the most impressionable age in the life of either man or woman. Warner had just attained the period we are mentioning, and was most susceptible to the admirable charms and attractions of Agnes Willoughby. He regarded her as a divinity. No matter what she had done, or what she had been guilty of, when he looked upon her face he could forgive her all, and much more. The silly boy, for he was nothing else, thought that to be able to call her his own would be supreme happiness—that no pleasure on earth could equal or even approach it. He would have fallen down and kissed her naked feet with the ardour of a fanatic when worshipping a senseless image of the Madonna. She looked upon him as a good catch, and in an interview which she had lately held with Mr. Dicks, it had been arranged between them that she should marry him. It was not a difficult task to accomplish. He was already hers in affection and devotion. It only required a few forms and ceremonies to make them man and wife. St. John Warner at length summoned up sufficient courage and resolution to speak a little more plainly to Agnes.

"It's no use beating about the bush, Agnes," he

said. "You know I'm rather rough in my manner. I'm not like the fellows you have been accustomed to—men in the Guards, and all that sort. They spend their lives in talking to women, and after such a lot of practice, they get swells at it. But I like riding and driving."

"Engine driving!" she said, mischievously.

"Yes, when I get a chance. If I had been a poor man I would have gone into the service of some railway company. I have my tastes. I like a good mill between two fellows. I've matched the Giant against a fellow, you see, at Bill Tupper's."

"My dear fellow, what's the use of talking to me about Bill Tupper's? These low places don't interest me at all."

"Excuse me, but it is not low. It's a dog place, you know."

"Very well; we won't say anything more about it. Go on with your love story."

"I don't see why I should not tell you," he said, after a pause of momentary duration. "You are the woman I love, Agnes."

"Nonsense!" she said, in a bantering tone.

"It isn't nonsense," he cried, indignantly. "I love you, Agnes! will you have me? I'll settle thirty thousand pounds on you, and a lot more when I'm five-and-twenty. I come into some tin then."

"That's an inducement, certainly," she replied, smiling.

"Say yes, darling, will you?" he exclaimed, going up to her and timidly taking her hand in

his. He seemed to be in doubt as to whether she would allow him to take the liberty or not. But she made no objection. He held her pretty little white hand in his, and looked at the pink, well-kept nails with their shining half-moons. A diamond ring sparkled on her finger. It was one that he had bought her.

"Why do you want to marry me?" asked Agnes.

"Because I love you. I want to make you my own. I am jealous of any one else looking at you. I want you to be mine altogether."

After saying this he grew bolder still, and played with her golden hair, and thought how wonderfully beautiful it was, and how he would like to cover it with kisses.

"Will you be mine, dearest Agnes?" he whispered. He was sentimental, she was practical.

"Will you give me till to-morrow?" she replied. "I shall be better able to tell you then. You are really in earnest in making me this offer; you do not think you will repent it afterwards!"

"Never!" he said, emphatically. "I love you too fondly ever to regret it."

"Well, go to your lawyer. Or, stop, go to mine—I will give you his address—and get the deeds drawn up. Come to me again to-morrow. Let it be kept an entire secret: tell no one. My lawyer is Mr. Solomon Eagle, of Lincoln's Inn Fields. Tell him I sent you. He will do all that is necessary, and he will meet you at my house at eleven to-morrow. I cannot promise that I will be yours,

but you may as well make every preparation. If I do not accept your offer, it will only be a waste of so much paper and parchment, and a few pounds for law expenses. If I agree to be your wife, let the ceremony take place as soon as possible—in two days if you like."

"The time cannot be too soon for me," replied Warner. "My darling, I feel quite maddened when I look at you. I long to take you away from everybody, and carry you off to Paris or some place on the Continent, where I can have you all to myself."

"I can't say anything more to you now," replied Agnes, with one of her most winning smiles. "Do as I have told you, and you shall have my answer to-morrow."

"Don't disappoint me, Agnes; you wont, will you?" said Warner.

"Run away; how can I tell?"

"But you mustn't. I will carry you off by force of arms. You shall be mine, if I die for it."

"Don't excite yourself," said Agnes. "There is nothing like taking things coolly. Good bye. Solomon Eagle, Lincoln's-inn. Nice fellow. You'll like him."

Warner shook her hand excitedly, and left the room.

When Agnes was alone, she gave vent to a soliloquy. "So it has come to this at last. What a fellow that astrologer is! He said I should marry—it must have been Warner he meant, or was it Milani? No! it could not have been him;

yet I would rather it was. Warner is all very well, but I do not care about him. He loves me but I could never reciprocate his attachment. Never! never! never!—there is nothing in him. He is not the sort of man I could look up to, and a woman always wants somebody she can respect—some one whom she knows is her master. Warner will always be my slave, and I hate a servile man. If I were to commit ever so flagrant an offence, he would forgive me if I asked him to. This sort of thing is all very well, but I don't care about it. He is very spoony on me though, and his marrying me will make me respectable—not that I care about that much, only it's something, and I shall have lots of money, without taking any trouble or bother to get it. I can go where I like and do what I like. I have every inclination to accept him—I only hesitate because——.” Here she paused and meditated. “I am getting tired of a life about town,” she mused. “There is something so unreal and hollow about it. But I have always been sufficiently sensible to look upon it as a means to an end. Very well; here is the end. I don't see that I can get a better end; and, being sick of the means, why should I not lay hold of what presents itself to me?”

Ringing the bell, she asked Wilkins if John had come for orders.

“Yes, mum, he is downstairs in the kitchen,” replied Wilkins.

“Then tell him to bring the brougham round directly.”

She hastily dressed herself, and, stepping into the vehicle, told the coachman to drive her to a house upon Clapham Common. It was the residence of Signor Milani. This was her reason for wavering, after Warner had so distinctly proposed to her. She evidently wished to give the great singer one more chance. To go to him, and question him again after the way in which he had treated her, was not a thing to be proud of; and she evidently felt that she was undergoing a humiliation, for her face was flushed and her lips dry, which showed that she was ill at ease.

Signor Milani was at home. Agnes did not send in her card; she merely told the servant to say that a lady wished to see her master. But the Italian, attracted by the sound of wheels stopping outside the door of his house, walked to the window and looked out. He recognised his visitor at a glance, and directed his servant to say that he was not at home.

"How can you say that?" exclaimed Agnes; "you have just been speaking to Signor Milani."

The servant stammered, and showed that he was not a proficient in the art of telling a falsehood.

"Go back," continued Agnes, "and say that I must see him!"

The servant did as he was told; he was a species of animated shuttlecock, knocked about from one battledore to the other.

The Italian this time sent back a more decided message than he had done on the first occasion.

"Tell the lady I will not see her!"

When Agnes heard this, she angrily pushed the servant on one side, and striding through the passage, entered the room in which he was. A grand piano stood in the centre of the room. It was open ; he had been practising. He rose from the music-stool as she made her appearance, and exclaiming, " You have come into my house without my permission," seized her by the arm, evidently with a view of forcibly ejecting her. But wrenching her arm free from his grasp, Agnes ran to the fireplace and caught up the poker. Armed with this, she stood upon the defensive.

" If you dare to come near me," she said, " I will break your head open with this ! Who are you, that you should not let me into your house ? I have been a fool long enough with you, and now you shall see that I am not to be treated in this cowardly way without resenting it. You have insulted me, and I intend to have my revenge. You have heard of angry women, haven't you ? Well, you find one before you now, and you will see in a moment what she will do. This is your house, and I suppose the furniture cost you something ; in that case it will not be a very great pleasure for you to see me smash it. Look ! As she spoke she dashed the poker against a splendid looking-glass which stood over the mantelpiece. It was only a blow dealt by a woman, but it ruined the mirror none the less. Some fine porcelain vases stood upon the mantelpiece, and a handsome clock in the centre. One vengeful sweep annihilated them beyond the power of the most adhesive cement

ever to put them together again. She was like a mad woman. She ran about the room in a state of the most ungovernable fury. She smashed all the pictures on the wall, and dealt the piano such terrific blows that the lid broke. Inserting the end of the poker in the hole, she tore up the wires, and made the beautiful instrument a wreck. Milani sat still in an armchair, and said, with a bitter laugh, "Smash away!"

At last her passion wore itself out. Tired with her fierce exertion she leaned against the wall, and placed her hand against her heart, which was palpitating violently. She looked towards Milani; he held something in his hand, it seemed like so much finely-cut glass.

He caught her glance fixed upon him, and exclaimed, "It does not matter, all this, I hold something in my hand, I have something here which will compensate me for the havoc you have made."

It was her bracelet, which during her efforts had slipped its clasp, and fallen from her wrist. Agnes was of a passionate disposition, but with her it was an affair of a moment. Her rage was over now, and she was comparatively calm; the reaction began to set in, and she sank upon the ground and cried like a child. The Italian never offered to move, he sat in his chair phlegmatically regarding her and the bracelet alternately. He looked at the latter as if estimating its value, and then he took a rapid glance round the room, as if reckoning up the damage, and wondering how much

it would cost to place everything in its proper position again. He was balancing profit and loss.

He did not feel the least scruple in appropriating Agnes's bracelet ; he was a cool, calculating man, and he thought he had a perfect right to do so.

Why should he lose a hundred and fifty or two hundred pounds worth of property simply because a woman chose to take umbrage at his refusing to see her ?

So he put the bracelet in his pocket, after admiring the fine water and the brilliancy of the stones. Agnes, in the meantime, continued to sit. Having had some little experience of women, Milani knew that the next phase would be a talkative one ; he understood very well that the passionate outburst came first, then the hysterical weeping, and thirdly the vituperative language and indignant invective. The first he had experienced ; the second was drawing to a close, and the third might be expected any moment.

Agnes checked her tears ; probably had he come to her and petted her, she might have prolonged them. Rising to her feet, she wiped her tear-stained cheek with her slender lace-bordered pocket-handkerchief, and looking at him with all the irony she could compass in her gaze, she exclaimed, in a voice a little broken by the violence of her emotion, which had not yet altogether subsided—

“ You may keep my bracelet, but you will be a thief, and I will give you in charge for it.”

“ Why do you come here to annoy me then ?”

“ I'll tell you why,” she replied, with an air of

triumph ; "because I am—going—to be—married!"

She spoke slowly and deliberately, so that every word she uttered might have a distinct meaning of its own. Milani appeared surprised.

"Do you mean what you say?" he said. "But why should I ask? what is it to me who or when you marry?"

"It is something, or you would not look so pale."

It was true that the famous singer was pale, but whether his pallor was owing to her announcement, or whether he was angry at having his furniture destroyed, it is difficult to say. Agnes evidently interpreted it in the former manner.

"Yes," she added, with the same triumphant smile; "I am going to be married, and I do it principally to be revenged on you for your cowardly treatment and brutality to me. I will let you see, my dear fellow, that you are not the only man in the world."

"Who is the happy man?" inquired Milani, trying to catch her satirical manner, but failing egregiously in the attempt.

"Never mind, you will know sooner than you like, perhaps."

"Is it the boy?"

"The boy, as you call him, is as good as you any day," replied Agnes; "he is a gentleman, which you are not and never will be; your low breeding and your bad blood will show itself."

"So it is the boy," he said, keeping his temper

beneath the storm of badinage and reproaches she heaped upon him.

"Yes, it is," she cried; "and you will see me more splendid, more spoken of, and more sought after than ever."

The Italian's eyes flashed, but hastily subduing this indication of hostility, he changed his manner altogether, and appeared soft, loving, conscience-stricken. In a tender tone, and looking at her appealingly, he said, "There is, then, no chance for me?"

Agnes started, she could not understand so sudden a conversion: the moment before he had been all smoke, and sword, and fire, now he was as gentle as a lamb, affectionate in his manner, and soft in his voice. At first she seemed in doubt whether he was in earnest or not, but there was every appearance of his contrition being genuine, she saw no reason to question his sincerity. This address brought about a revulsion of feeling in her love; the old love cropped up again, like snowdrops in a thaw, and bursting once more into tears, she sat down upon his knee, and laid her head upon his bosom. A demoniacal expression lighted up the Italian's face, but this Agnes did not see, she was thinking that he had relented, and was about to make her a similar offer to the one she had that morning met with from Warner. Milani did not make any demonstration; he did not kiss her, or press her hand, or stroke her hair; he did not appear in the humour for doing any of these things. Perhaps her marvellous beauty had palled upon him; he waited for her to speak.

"Oh ! yes, there is a chance for you," she murmured, at length, when her fit of weeping had subsided. "You know my affection for you ; you know what a poor weak fool I always am when you are kind to me ; it is only when you treat me as you did this morning that I lose my temper and become almost mad. You are so well aware of my love, that you take advantage of me. Is it not so ?"

Milani still preserved a discreet silence.

"Will you save me from this man ?" she continued ; "you can if you like. If you reject me, I become his bride, nothing can prevent me. You have only to say the word, and I give him up, I am yours. Tell me what you will do."

The Italian's eyes twinkled with a savage pleasure, he raised her up by the arm, and held her out. She thought this was a playful action on his part, and smiled sweetly, but she was stunned and astounded when he cried—

"No, no no ! a thousand times no. I would rather die here, in this room, than marry you. I only brought about this confession of your weakness to humble you more than I have ever succeeded in doing before. You defied me ; you now feel my power, and the force of my resentment. I leave you to your reflections."

Milani rose to his feet, allowed her to sink back in the armchair, and glided in a stealthy manner from the room. Agnes was too much overcome to attempt to follow him.

CHAPTER XII.

MILANI.

ALTHOUGH Agnes was an openly declared advocate of pleasure, and a professed admirer of those frivolities which amuse the mind, if you can only compel it to be engaged by them, it will be seen that her existence was not one of happiness unalloyed. Before she met Milani she might have been happy, after her manner, for we all have our own way of achieving peace, quietness, and contentment. Some set their standard too high, others too low, and with a vast number the current of life gets warped and turned on one side. Eddies and whirlpools arise, and all is storm and perturbation. So it was with Agnes. Her unfortunate passion for the Italian destroyed her steerage way, and left her rudderless to float upon the stream whose sides were girt with precipitous rocks and dangerous shoals. When Milani left her to herself she felt the full force of the expression "taking up one's cross." She had not only to take it up, but to bear it, and for the time its weight overpowered her. She blamed herself for being so weak as to seek the Italian when, if she had only thought a little, she might have so easily foretold what his treatment of her would be. He had openly told her in her box at the Opera that she was far beneath his notice ; and yet so infatuated

was she, that she could not keep away from him. She was drawn towards him by an irresistible fascination, and now, even now, incredible as it may seem, she bewailed his sudden departure, and would have given worlds to stay his flight. She would have begged him, entreated him, prayed him, to stay and reconsider his determination. But no, he had driven her from him ; he had declared by his manner that the parting was to be final ; and he had hurled all the obloquy and contempt upon her of which his nature was capable. It was certainly astonishing that such conduct did not move her. Its effect upon most people would have been speedily decided. In spite of its proud throbs, there was no doubt that Milani was the actual possessor of her heart. Yet it was pusillanimous in her to think of him with kindness and consideration after the cowardly manner in which he had behaved to her.

After his departure she sat in the chair in which he had placed her for some time in a state of stupefaction bordering upon despair. She did not move ; her head had fallen upon her arm, and she moaned occasionally in a pitiable manner ; all her hopes and visions of happiness had been blighted, and she was compelled to go forth into the world again a heartless woman with a grievance—a mind diseased, ever cankering the mental core and productive of nothing but evil. She had indulged in pleasant dreams of returning to Italy with the accomplished Italian, and settling down in the sunny clime of his birth, never thinking of England, and leaving behind her the heavy load of what Puritans—and they are

legion—denominate shame, which she had accumulated ; and the idea of dwelling in some Capua, within whose walls she could devote her existence to Milani and to him alone, had so captivated her romantic spirit, that it was hard to be divorced from a hope she had cherished for a long, long time.

When she roused herself from her misery and, sitting up, looked about her, it was past noon. The sun was high in the heavens, emitting golden beams towards the earth. A sense of desolation fell around her, and, recalling the prophetic words of the astrologer, she saw that all hope of a union with Milani was at an end. It was to be her fate to wed a man with whom she had nothing in common ; whose person was indifferent to her, and who did not possess one single qualification, mental or physical, which she could look upon as an attraction. With a hardness in her heart, which was swelling to still larger dimensions, she prepared to meet her destiny. “ Let me blot him out of my mind,” she said with a sigh. “ Let me drive him from my thoughts, for indeed he is not worthy of the great love I would have lavished upon him, and the best proof of the immensity of my love is that I forgive him all that he has done to me, that I cannot bring myself to meet unkindness by unkindness, separation by reproaches. My lenity towards him shows very plainly that I love him ; but henceforward I will endeavour to erase him from my memory, and I will try to forget that such a man as Milani ever existed. Warner loves me, and the exigencies of my position are such that I must

sacrifice somebody ; he comes in an appropriate moment, and he shall have me. God only knows whether we shall be happy or the reverse. I fear the latter. But I can't help it. I am like Rome in a time of great danger to the State. A victim is required, and Horace Warner must be the propitiation I offer to the Fates."

She looked haggard and dishevelled : going to the glass she hastily adjusted her hair, and drawing a gold box shaped like an egg from her pocket, she unscrewed the top, and taking out of it a small powder puff, put on her face what is commonly called splash. She then bent her bonnet into its normal shape, shook her shawl and her crinoline into their proper position, and prepared to take leave of a house which would always be associated in her mind with the most bitter memories. Just as she was passing through the door she perceived upon the mat outside a handkerchief. It had marked in one corner with black silk the single letter M. She stooped down, while a blush suffused her face, and picked it up. Raising it to her lips she kissed it with most passionate ardour, and allowed it to flutter back again to its former position. It was her last adieu, an affecting as well as a pretty farewell.

Milani did not know the devotion that he was throwing into the street, nor was he acquainted with the events of the future, or he would not have been so blind to his own interests as to repudiate the warmest-hearted woman it was ever his lot to meet with. Could he have rent asunder

the mists that veil the future, and have read the fiery scroll of fate, he would have thought more of Agnes Willoughby's love than he did at present. Getting into her brougham she sank upon the yielding cushions with a dejected air. The driver wished to know whether she would go home. She replied in the negative, directing him to go to Charley Dicks's in Piccadilly.

During that brief drive tumultuous passions surged through her breast, and she was the prey of severe agitation. Although she still preserved a sentiment of affection for Milani, she could not resist the temptation of resolving to make herself so celebrated in various ways as Mrs. Horace St. John Warner, as to excite a feeling of envy in the Italian, and a lasting regret that he had permitted so universally admired a woman to slip through his fingers and become the wife of another. The weather was the reverse of Moscovian ; it was hot and sultry, and Agnes let down one of the windows of the brougham so that the air might rush in upon her and cool her heated brow.

Mr. Dicks was just preparing to go out ; his horse stood ready saddled at the door. But when Agnes was announced he postponed his ride, and expressed a wish to see her immediately.

She entered the room looking rather downcast, but she changed her demeanour when she found that he was waiting to receive her. There was a wild look about her eyes, such as you see in patients who are being treated by mad doctors for incipient insanity.

"Something to drink!" she exclaimed; "make haste."

"What would you like?" said Dicks.

"Oh, any d——d thing; I don't care."

There was a handsome silver cup on the side-board, in which were two or three pieces of thyme. Charley Dicks hastily opened a bottle of soda-water, emptied it into the cup, and throwing in a dash of brandy, poured some champagne upon the top of the others, almost immediately afterwards handing it to Agnes, who took two or three prolonged draughts, and set it down almost empty.

"Now I can talk to you," she said.

"I have something to say to you—a sort of bone to pick," replied Dicks.

"Then you'd better keep it; I'm not in the humour to be talked to now."

"All right," replied Dicks, good-naturedly; "go ahead!"

"I'm going to marry Warner," she exclaimed.

"I've no objection to that," answered the astute Mr. Dicks; "always provided he makes a handsome settlement, and you do the honourable by me. If not, I'll spoil it. It will be my disagreeable duty to do so."

"You had better go up to Solomon Eagle," replied Agnes; "he can tell you more about the matter than I can. Warner was to go to him to-day, and make all the preliminary arrangements."

"What did he promise you?" asked Dicks, abruptly.

"Thirty thousand down ; that is to be settled on me, and a lot more when he is twenty-five."

"That must be set out in the deed," exclaimed Dicks. "Promises are no more use than pie-crust. When are these deeds to be signed ?"

"To-morrow, at eleven," replied Agnes.

"Very well. In that case I had better run up to Eagle's, and see how things are going on. He will bring with him to-morrow one or two little papers for your signature."

"He may bring what he likes," replied Agnes ; "but I shall not sign them without I like."

"I don't know that."

"Don't you ? Well, you'll see."

"Oh, I know you are capable of a great deal. I met Billy Blue Jones yesterday, and he pitched it into me strong about you."

"I don't wonder at that," answered Agnes. "I gave the beast something to remember me by. It served him right ; he shouldn't have done it."

"Take my advice," exclaimed Charley Dicks ; "don't you go near him again. He swears he will kill you if he can get hold of you."

"He'll have to do it first. I'm not a fool, Charley, any more than you are."

"No ; I don't say you are."

"Look here," said Agnes ; "how much do you expect me to give you for your introduction to Warner ?"

"Something under a million."

"Don't talk stupidly ; give me an answer."

"Well, I shall want five thousand pounds, and I

must stand in in the plucking. He's a fine goose, and his golden feathers are worth something."

"I don't mean to pluck him," replied Agnes, decidedly.

"No! Why not?"

"Because it doesn't suit me. I can make my game better by sticking to him than I can by allowing a lot of fellows to rob him right and left. If he were my man it would be another thing; but he is to be my husband. Do you understand? What should I get by his being fooled by you? He wouldn't have a rap after a bit, and what should I do?"

"That's nothing to me," said Dicks; "you'd do, I suppose, what most women do when they are laid on the shelf—keep a shop, or something."

He had no sooner uttered these words than all the blood in her body seemed to rush to Agnes's head. Her face was livid and convulsed with passion. Catching hold of the cup she had been drinking from, she hurled it at him. It struck him on the forehead, and laid the flesh open. The blood trickled down, and he staggered against the wall.

"You'll talk to me like that again, will you?" she exclaimed.

Sinking into a chair, he appeared stunned. Agnes looked at him as if she wished her glance could petrify him, and did not move a finger to assist him.

Dicks would never have spoken to her as he had done, had he not been annoyed by her saying that she should endeavour to frustrate any attempt he

or his friends might make to lighten Mr. Warner's purse, which she considered she had a right to look upon as her peculiar property after she had contracted an alliance with him.

He had thought that he could subdue her by blustering and bullying, but he found himself mistaken. She stood like a modern Boadicea celebrating an undoubted triumph. Hardly a minute had elapsed before Dicks was sufficiently recovered to speak ; he had not been much hurt, but the shock of the sudden blow and the totally unexpected attack, had muddled his senses for a time.

" Oh ! you can open your eyes, eh ?" exclaimed Agnes. " You know, I want you to understand that I am not going to be talked to just as you like. What are you ? I suppose you wouldn't like everybody to know, eh ? I could tell them, though. You start women, don't you ? and pick up men for them, and then try and make a lot of money out of them ; but it won't pay with me. If you had treated me properly, I would have given you five or six thousand pounds ; now you shan't have a halfpenny."

Charley Dicks, in reply to this torrent of abuse, contented himself with uttering the single word, " Milani."

" If that's the only card you have to rely upon, you may as well throw up your hand," replied Agnes, disdainfully. " Why, my dear man, I don't care that for Milani."

" Perhaps not," said Dicks ; " but some one else may."

"Who?" she demanded.

"Warner," he said, sitting up and stanching the blood which poured from his wound with a handkerchief.

"Warner would pay much more attention to anything I said to him than to what came from you."

After a silence of short duration, Charley Dicks said, "Come, it's no use quarrelling; let's square it. I'll go up to Solomon's, and he shall talk it over with you to-morrow morning."

"Do as you like in that respect," replied Agnes; "but don't you attempt to take any liberties with me. I expect on all occasions, never mind what the relations are between us, to be treated by men like you as if I were a perfect lady."

"All right," answered the discomfited Mr. Dicks. "Don't get shirty."

"I shan't say anything more to you now," exclaimed Agnes. "Send Solomon to me, and I'll settle everything with him. But one thing's certain; I shall marry Warner in spite of you and all the other powers of darkness."

Without wishing him good-bye, she swept from the room in the Mrs. Siddons' style, and drove to a friend's house, where she dined, and endeavoured to forget her trying interview with the fickle Milani.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PROVERBIAL STEPFATHER.

PERHAPS it was not wise for Agnes to quarrel with and defy her friend, Charles Dicks ; but it is the way of the world to kick away a crutch when you think you have no further use for it. It is just possible that one may dispense with the friendly bit of timber too soon, and when crutches do not happen to be cheap, bad times ensue for cripples. However, Agnes had no misgivings with regard to Dicks ; she felt that she could stand alone ; and she was sure that her influence over Horace Warner was so great, that no solicitation from any quarter would induce him to look coldly upon her.

If an angel of light told him that she had been guilty of some misdemeanour, she was under the impression that she could disabuse his mind of the prejudicial report, however true and well founded it might be. So she left Dicks' house without the least apprehension.

The next morning she was up early ; she had taken great care not to stay out late the night before, because she wished to have her brain clear and unclogged with the fumes of drink, in order that she might transact the important business of the day without anything occurring

to mar the smoothness with which she intended everything to go.

Her first visitor made his appearance at half-past nine. When she heard the knock at the door she took him for an impatient postman or the milkman in a hurry. The card he sent in had upon it, "Lionel Cooper, Duke Street, St. James's."

"Who on earth can that be, I wonder?" she said; "is it some friend of Milau's, come to make it up? Anyhow, I'll see him. I am just in the mind to receive a deputation from the House of Commons. I'll talk to him."

When she entered her drawing-room, she found Mr. Lionel Cooper examining a pretty sketch in oils after Watteau: he turned round upon hearing her footsteps, and with a smiling countenance, exclaimed:—

"You must allow me the honour of introducing myself."

"Oh! certainly," replied Agnes. "Pray sit down."

"I hope you won't be offended at any remarks I am going to make," said Mr. Cooper.

"Not at all."

"A young gentleman is very much interested in you," he began.

"Can I help that?" exclaimed Agnes, assuming a ludicrous air.

"I do not say you can."

"Will you be a little explicit, please? Who is it? I am like a pretty girl in a ball-room,

you know. I have more than one name on my card."

"So I have been given to understand; and I am glad you have spoken to me like this, because it will save me a great deal of embarrassment in the conversation that I wish to have with you."

Agnes had, during this colloquy, examined Mr. Cooper critically. He had a gentlemanly address, and was an agreeable man to talk to. The inference she drew was in favour of her visitor.

"You have not yet told me who it is that is so good as to take an interest in me. Not your son, I hope?"

"His name's Warner," replied Mr. Lionel Cooper.

"Oh!" thought Agnes, "I see which way the cat jumps now. I wonder what in the world he has come about?"

"I know Mr. Warner slightly," she said.

"Only slightly?" he replied.

"Do you want me to kiss a Bible and take an oath about it?" said Agnes, with affected indignation.

"Certainly not."

"Then perhaps you will tell me what Mr. Warner is to you, and why you have come to me to talk about him."

"That is just what I want to do. Warner is a relative of mine—I married his mother after her first husband's death; consequently he is my stepson. My business with you is of a very delicate

nature ; indeed, so much so that I hardly know how to begin. I beg that you will not think I am unnecessarily rude, or that I wish to hurt your feelings in anything I may say."

" That depends."

" I must take my chance, then. I received a note this morning—I will be candid with you—informing me that Horace was going to marry a lady of the name of Agnes Willoughby. I had heard of you, and I felt alarmed because I was well acquainted with your powers of fascination—and to tell you the truth, I thought the best thing I could do was to put myself into a hansom and go at once to you and see about the matter. I had no difficulty in finding you, for your address was given me in the letter, which, by the way, was anonymous."

" Have you any objection to show me the letter?" exclaimed Agnes, her lips twitching nervously. She was anxious to find out who this enemy was, who wore a mask and stabbed in the dark.

" Not the slightest," replied Mr. Lionel Cooper. " Here is the letter ; I brought it with me for the express purpose of showing it to you."

He handed her a letter as he spoke. She had no sooner glanced at the superscription than she recognised Milani's handwriting. She did not faint or make a scene—she was too well prepared for some such exhibition of malignity and malevolence on his part to be surprised at the dastardly act of which he had been guilty. He had written—

"I am a stranger to you ; but I write with the intention of conferring a benefit upon you. Your stepson, Mr. Warner, is in love with an unscrupulous and designing woman, who is plotting his ruin. There is every probability of a marriage taking place between them. It has occurred to me that this can hardly be in accordance with your wishes. If you would avert the catastrophe, you must take prompt measures.—Yours faithfully,

"FIRST IN THE FIELD."

Agnes's cheek burned as she read this, with mingled emotions. "Could it be possible," she thought, "that Milani repented of his conduct to her, and wished to keep her single in order that he might unite himself to her at his pleasure?" No! She dismissed this supposition from her thoughts after a very brief consideration. The most probable interpretation of the matter was, that finding she was on the eve of making an eligible match, he was doing all that lay in his power to frustrate her attempt : his vindictiveness was making itself felt. Biting her lips with vexation and annoyance, she crumpled the note in her hand until she compressed it into a ball.

"The note is not very flattering to yourself," said Mr. Cooper ; "but anonymous letters very rarely are. Do you know the writer?"

"Perfectly!" replied Agnes. "He has chosen this way of showing his resentment for some fancied injury which he attributes to me."

"Is there any truth in what he says?"

"Suppose there was?" asked Agnes, with an impertinent air.

"If so, I should be obliged to do all in my power to prevent the misguided young man from falling into the snare that has been laid for him."

"Do you think, Mr. Cooper," said Agnes, "that I am not good enough for your relation?"

"If you ask me my frank opinion, and wish for a straightforward answer, I can have no hesitation in replying that I do not think you are."

"In that case I am sorry for you, and your opinion too."

"Why?" he asked.

"Oh! for a very plain reason—I shall marry him to-morrow!"

"What!" cried Mr. Lionel Cooper, springing from his chair.

"Now, my dear fellow, sit down," said Agnes. "Don't excite yourself. What's the good of it? You are the man's stepfather."

"Yes," he replied, resuming his seat in obedience to her command.

"Just listen to me, will you, for a minute or two! Stepfathers are not generally considered to be very good guardians of the children that they may acquire property in when they take the widowed mother to church. I don't suppose you are an exception to the rule. The fact, no doubt, is, that you don't care a straw for the boy, but you have an interest in some of his money. Is it not so? You will lose something by his marrying a

poor woman and making a settlement upon her."

Mr. Cooper made no reply. Agnes had detected his real object in coming to her, but he did not like to admit that such was the case.

"Oh! you won't confess it," she continued. "But your silence proves that you are unable to deny it. Now, what do you find objectionable in me? Eh? Am I ugly?—am I old?"

"For my part," returned Mr. Cooper, "I think you are a very charming woman. But Horace is too young to marry. I daresay you would make him a good wife. I should like him to travel for a year or two; and then he would know his own mind better than he does at present. May I make you an offer? I am a liberal as well as a practical man. What will you take to give up young Warner?"

"My dear Mr. Cooper, you put that so prettily to me, that I do not see how I can refuse you."

Actuated by a sudden impulse, Agnes spoke like this. She thought it would be an excellent joke to accept the stepfather's offer, and throw him off the scent by pretending to acquiesce in his wishes. He was entirely deceived by her manner, which was as ingenuous as it could be. This was an enigma for Lavater. The established rules in the science of physiognomy are very often proved to be defective.

"I will give you a cheque for five hundred pounds with pleasure, if you will undertake to

cease giving him any encouragement when he visits you. So accomplished and so generally admired a woman as yourself ought to do better than marry a boy who is not the most agreeable companion you could have for life."

"Your arguments are convincing," she answered. "He has spoken to me of marriage, and perhaps I might have acceded to his request. He said something about marrying me to-morrow; but I am a creature of impulse, Mr. Cooper, and I change my mind a dozen times in a day. I believe, as you say, that I can do better than marry your stepson."

"Of course you can, my dear child—of course you can," replied Mr. Cooper, enchanted with his success. "I shall start him off for Germany directly. I don't at all like his knocking about town. By the way, is he coming to see you to-day?"

"No," replied Agnes; "I don't expect him to-day; he said he was going into the country. But he was to be with me to-morrow at ten o'clock, without fail."

"In the country," mused Mr. Lionel Cooper. "Let me see. Harpenden—yes—Harpenden Races. I suppose he's gone there with some of his Hay-market friends. Well, I have your assurance that if he calls upon you again you will deny yourself to him."

"You may rely upon my doing that," said Agnes. "I always pride myself upon keeping my word."

"Then all I have to do is to write out a cheque for the five hundred pounds, which is the amount we agreed upon, I think. Fortunately, I have my book in my pocket, and there is a blank cheque in it. Can you oblige me with a pen and some ink? Sorry to trouble you. Thanks."

He took a cheque from his pocket-book, unfolded it, and holding the pen in his hand, exclaimed, "What name shall I say?"

"Agnes Willoughby," she replied.

He rapidly filled in the name, and handed her the draft.

"And now, good morning, Miss Willoughby," he said; "I rely upon your discretion, and I have to thank you very much for the obliging manner in which you have met me half way in this business, which I hope has been less unpleasant to you than it has been to me."

"Good morning, Mr. Cooper," said Agnes, hardly able to refrain from laughing; "a course of German metaphysics will do Horace more good than anything else."

"Quite so—quite so," replied Lionel Cooper in a cheery tone.

His cab was waiting at the door, and when Agnes heard the wheels going over the stones, she looked at her watch, and exclaimed—

"Thank God! just in time."

It wanted but five minutes to eleven, and at that hour Warner and the attorney, Solomon Eagle, were expected to arrive. It would have been seriously inconvenient for Agnes if Warner had come

while his stepfather was in the house. Now she had a clear day's start of his relations, and she determined to make the most of it. She made up her mind to advertise their marriage, when it took place, in every newspaper, so that Milani would be unable to take up a public print without noticing the galling intelligence, for such it would unquestionably be to him.

Exactly as the clock struck the one hour before noon, Solomon Eagle made his appearance with a bag full of papers ; Horace Warner was a quarter of an hour later. He was delighted to see Agnes, and assured her that he had done everything in the way of law that Solomon Eagle requested him. The three people sat down in solemn conclave.

Mr. Solomon Eagle, as may be readily supposed, had not neglected the interests of his client. Agnes was on her marriage with Mr. Horace St. John Warner to have the sum of thirty thousand pounds settled upon her for her separate use during her lifetime, and she was further to have seven hundred a-year when her husband should be five-and-twenty. This was in addition to the first-mentioned sum, giving her altogether a life-interest in a large fortune and a handsome income. In the event of her having children, the moneys so settled were to go as remainder over to them jointly, unless she chose to make a power of appointment, distributing it differently. If she died first, and without issue, the settled property was to revert to the husband. Mr. Solomon Eagle was appointed a trustee to look after the interest of the *cestui-qui* trust. After all

the documents had been signed by Warner with the utmost alacrity and goodwill, and duly attested by competent witnesses, the happy man, after some billing and cooing exigent on the occasion, took his leave, to go to Doctors' Commons to procure a licence, it being arranged that the ceremony should take place the next morning at All Saints' Church, in Margaret Street, that pretty ecclesiastical plaything, offspring of the High Church mind. Agnes was to go to the altar in her usual dress, there not being time to attire herself more elaborately, and it being deemed inexpedient, for many reasons, to postpone the wedding over the following day. Warner promised to return to his intended's house when he had finished his business, and Agnes was left alone with the attorney.

When Warner had gone, Mr. Solomon Eagle rose, and, with characteristic caution, opened the door and peeped into the passage, to see if any one was loitering about with a view of listening to their conversation. He found the sagacious Wilkins in close proximity to the door, with a broom in her hand. She immediately fell to sweeping with all her might and main, as if her life depended upon her industry.

"Go downstairs, young woman," sternly exclaimed Mr. Eagle; "you can finish your work here afterwards."

Wilkins dropped an elaborate curtsey, and retired with dignity into the lower regions.

"Keep your eye on that girl of yours, madam,"

said the attorney when he returned. "I never trust to a servant; and she may spoil all your plans."

Agnes assured him there was no fear of Wilkius betraying her in any way, even if she had overheard what was going on, as she was the most faithful creature she had ever had about her.

Mr. Solomon Eagle shook his head, and said, "I doubt it, madam. But let it pass. I hope I have so drawn these deeds (slapping his fist on them as he spoke) as to meet with your approbation."

"I have no fault to find with them," she replied.

"In that case I have only to talk to you about a matter personal to your friend, Mr. Dicks. He instructs me that he has a fair claim upon you; that a difference has arisen between you respecting it, and that by mutual consent the dispute has been referred to me. Is this so?"

"Yes; I believe I did tell him to go to you."

"Good!" replied Solomon. "It is clearly understood by both parties that I am arbitrator. Mr. Dicks, our worthy friend, considers himself entitled to a little matter of five thousand pounds. It is not to be expected that you can command so much money; but there is a way of doing it."

Agnes expressed a wish to know what that was.

Give me your note for five thousand five hundred pounds, and I hand him over the money. It will not cost you anything; for Mr. Warner will have to pay it to me. He will of course be answerable for your debts

and liabilities. Here is a bill stamp. Just be good enough to write. Shall I dictate? A pen? Yes. Try this one. That is it. Now then, please:—‘I promise to pay one month after date’ Get that? ‘the sum of five thousand five hundred’ (That was it, I think? Yes.) ‘5500 pounds.’”

Agnes made a mistake, and spoilt the stamp; it was a valuable one. But the attorney had another in his pocket. This time he wrote out the form for her, not omitting to insert the important words “for value received,” though he would have had some difficulty in persuading a jury as to the consideration. She attached her name to it, and the affair was at an end. Mr. Solomon Eagle folded up the promissory note and placed it in a leathern receptacle, bowed blandly, and took his leave.

For some time after his departure, Agnes remained wrapped in meditative mood. She could not conceal from herself that she should have been happier in the society of Milani, but as that was clearly out of the question, she congratulated herself upon making the best provision she could for her declining years. Her common sense told her that a time would come when men would no longer whisper soft nothings in her ear, nor follow her about with vexatious pertinacity for no other reward than a look or a shake of the hand, nor praise her good looks, her full and lustrous eyes, and her golden hair, though the time was still far distant; but every year in a woman’s life after five-and-twenty is twelve months to the bad, and women who lead a fast life do not last so long as those who

have an opportunity of dwelling in Arcadian quietness. Some women who lead the rackety life that a woman about town is of necessity compelled to lead, must have equine constitutions to go through the wear and tear, and the incessant fatigue they are obliged to undergo. But they are for the most part girls from the country, who inherit robust constitutions from their parents, and are enabled to stand a great deal before they break up, which they must do if they go on long enough.

Women are often obliged to get half tipsy before they can talk to men in the vivacious manner which has a charm whether in the ball-room, at Almack's, or the casino ; and sparkling wit, together with the most brilliant talents, such as the De Staël might have been proud of, are often to be met with in a sphere where they are unfortunately cabined and confined, dimmed by late hours, dulled by vicious associations, and choked by an over-indulgence in alcohol. So Agnes began to look upon herself as fortunate in having met with Horace Warner. There was something that pleased her in the idea of being married. "It will be such a sell to all the people who hate me ! I shall have all the men after me more than ever ; but I wont look at them, or, if I do flirt with them, it'll only be to make them as mad as blazes because they didn't marry me instead of Warner. I shall send cards to all the women I know. I don't see the fun of no cards. It always seems to me as if people who do without them can't afford them. Anyhow, it's a miserly sort of thing that I wont do to please anybody. O

course it'll go about everywhere : they'll be talking of it at Kate's to-morrow night, and the Count's, and Lizzie Davis's. Lizzie's sure to have it first. I remember when Baby Jordan married Sheridan, I dropped in at Lizzie's, and she said directly—

“ ‘Have you heard the news ? Who do you think’s married ?’

“ ‘Not Skittles ?’ I said.

“ ‘No ; you’ll never guess. Baby Jordan.’

“ And that’s how they’ll talk about me.”

Agnes contemplated her future, and the more she thought about it the more she liked it. She began to school herself to forget Milani ; but she could not help being indignant at his cowardly conduct in writing an anonymous letter to Warner's step-father, in order that the marriage might be prevented. “ It's the most cowardly thing,” she said, “ I think I ever remember hearing of. But I'll marry safe enough, and that will be the best way of revenging myself on so perfidious a beast. How that man must hate me ! And why ? I have never done him any harm ; I have always been very good to him. I suppose the reason is that I have loved him too much. I remember hearing a woman who had been about town fifteen years or more, say that men didn't like women who stick up to them too much. They prefer a woman who makes them run after her. If you run into a man's arms, he wont thank you for it. Stolen fruit's always the sweetest ; and I believe what she said to be perfectly true.”

Agnes got up in a very good temper to go down

stairs, as was her frequent custom, to ask the cook what she could give her for lunch. When she reached the top of the kitchen staircase, she thought she heard voices—one was Wilkins', the other she was unfamiliar with. Descending a stair or two with the utmost caution, she heard the man say—

“I'll make you a handsome present if you will find out for me.”

“What if I know already?” replied Wilkins.

“Then here's a ten-pound note for you. You shall have it as soon as you give me the information I require.”

“I'll do it,” replied Wilkins. “Show me the money.”

Agnes heard the chink of gold, and waited impatiently for what her maid might say next.

“It's to be to-morrow morning,” said Wilkins.

“Where?” asked the man.

“All Saints' Church, in Margaret Street.”

“You are sure of that?”

“Positive; I heard it by listening outside the door.”

Agnes had heard enough. Quietly slipping into her boudoir again, she sat down and brooded over the treachery she had discovered in the most accidental manner. She felt hurt at the unfaithfulness of Wilkins, in whom she had always placed the greatest confidence.

“It teaches me one thing,” she muttered, “and that is, not to trust any one. I wouldn't trust my own mother after this.”

It was fortunate she had found it out, for she

could now concert some plan with Charley Dicks to thwart any effort that might be made by the opposite and hostile party to prevent the match coming off. Of course the man who had bribed the faithless but still sagacious Wilkins, was an emissary of Milani or Mr. Lionel Cooper. Agnes was inclined to lean to the former supposition ; it was more in accordance with the subtle and underhand nature of the Italian to play the spy upon her, and to tamper with the fidelity of the servant, than with that of the open and unsuspecting Englishman. Thinking of Lionel Cooper recalled the cheque he had given her to her memory, and she thought she might just as well go and get the money for it, as gold and notes were better and more serviceable any day. Accordingly, she ordered her brougham. Wilkins dressed her as usual, but her mistress did not allow her to suppose for a moment that she had found her out, and detected her in her nefarious designs.

Agnes's intention was to dismiss her as soon as she was married to Horace St. John Warner. The cheque was drawn on Ransomie and Bouverie, and the drive to Pall Mall wasn't one of long duration. After getting the money, Agnes told the coachman to drive round the Regent's Park, a favourite resort of hers when she wished to think. She was excited by the events of the morning, and wished to calm herself.

In the early part of her career, she had often made the man drive to the little bridge across the canal, and getting out just as the day was breaking, she would stand on the bridge and look over the

side. It pleased her to gaze at the water, if she happened to be in a miserable mood. Wearied and disgusted with all the world, and with herself as well, low spirited from the reaction which follows excessive drinking, she would long to throw herself into the cool, inviting lake, and lave her burning brow, her parched and feverish lips ; a secret voice, still and small, but fascinating and dangerous beyond conception, would urge her to tear off her meretricious trappings, throw them into the water, and leap in after them. Then would there be an end to everything, and the overladen heart, fainting with its constant load, would be at rest. A dread of the long, endless eternity, awful to contemplate, and other mysteries too great and maddening to dwell upon, restrained her ; and so she would stand gazing at the satin-like surface of the water, a fiend below tempting her to destruction, an angel on high restraining her from the fatal allurements of the bad and evil spirit.

When Agnes reached home, she inquired if Warner had returned. The answer was in the negative. "That's odd," she thought ; "I wonder what has become of him ?"

CHAPTER XIV.

A CHAPTER OF ACCIDENTS.

WHEN five o'clock came, bringing with it no Horace Warner, Agnes began to grow much alarmed. A thousand random suppositions ran through her head, and innumerable vague conjectures besieged her mind. It was very probable that Milani had contrived, in conjunction with Lionel Cooper, to intercept the young man in some way, and that they had subsequently carried him off, thinking that by removing him to a safe distance, they would prevent the possibility of an alliance between himself and her. What more likely than that Milani, not content with writing one anonymous letter, should put himself into communication with Lionel Cooper, and exert himself to the utmost to rescue Warner from the toils in which Agnes had enveloped him. It was with pain and apprehension that she entertained these suspicions. She was, however, far too sensible a woman to lull herself by vain and silly hopes into a false state of security, from which she might be rudely awakened any day. To lose Warner, just at the time when she had felt most secure of his lasting affection, was in itself a great blow, because it dashed all her hopes to the ground, and checked her in the full tide of

self-congratulation in which she had been indulging. Leaving strict orders with Wilkins that if Warner should arrive during her absence, he was on no account to be allowed to go away until she returned, she left her house, and getting into a cab, drove quickly to Piccadilly. Charley Dicks was out, and she had to wait an hour for him, dying all the while with impatience, and fretting to such an extent that she almost worried herself into a low fever. She angrily tore her gloves to picces, and threw the fragments on the floor. These attracted Dicks' attention directly he arrived, and he knew at once that she was in a bad temper.

"Something's put her ladyship out," he muttered, to himself ; "I hope it's nothing about Warner."

"Sorry you should have been kept waiting," he said ; "has anything gone wrong?"

Agnes told him briefly that she was afraid such was the case. She had seen nothing of Warner, although he had promised faithfully to return in about a couple of hours.

"A wedding without a bridegroom—articles like that not kept on the premises. Awkward, by Jove!" he exclaimed. "But I don't see why you should be alarmed ; there is plenty of time for him to turn up yet. You know how uncertain he is."

Agnes then told him about Lionel Cooper, the anonymous letter, and how her servant had been tampered with.

Dicks did not like this, and, with a curse, said, "Looks bad, it does by ——"

"What shall I do?" asked Agnes.

He thought a moment, walking up and down the room with long strides.

"There's a screw loose somewhere," he said ; "I'll take my oath of that. The best thing you can do is to go home and wait till ten or eleven o'clock, say eleven ; and if Warner doesn't turn up, you may say he's like a bad halfpenny, more of the duffer about him than anything else. Then you come to me again, and I shall be better able to tell you what to do. Will you come here, or meet me somewhere ?"

"I don't care," she replied, with an irritable gesture.

"Then meet me at Goodered's."

"The Pic!" she exclaimed ; "I'm sure I shan't. I wouldn't go there for anything."

"All right," he said ; "don't put yourself out."

"Besides," continued Agnes, "you'd be clever to get in there before twelve o'clock."

"Will you come to the Argyll ?"

"Not with you, certainly. If I come to your house, it's no reason why I should be seen with you in public. Why, people would think you were keeping me, and that would be a let down. I have always had a reputation for liking gentlemen up to the present time, and I don't see the fun of losing it now."

"You are always talking about gentlemen," he said, testily. "One man's as good as another."

"Ah ! my dear fellow, there's something about a gentleman, I don't exactly know what, but there's something that men like you never can get hold of."

His only reply to this was to light a cigar, at which he puffed with severe determination.

"I'll tell you where I'll meet you, about a quarter past twelve," exclaimed Agnes. "That's at Matty Wood's or Rose Young's. Which do you like best? I suppose Matty's would suit you; there are always a lot of betting men there, and at Coney's, and Jack Percival's."

"You be at Matty Wood's, then, will you?" said Mr. Dicks. "We may be able to spot Warner at some of the night-houses. It is just within the bounds of probability that he may have gone on the spree and forgotten all about you."

Agnes admitted that this was probable. But she did not place much faith in the fragile straw that he had thrown out for her to clutch hold of. She was strongly of opinion that he had fallen into the hands of his relations, and that they had removed him from London.

Taking leave of Dicks she went home, and sitting in her boudoir she took up a book and endeavoured to read. She would have very much liked to go out and amuse herself somewhere till midnight. But she thought it more prudent to stay at home. Theatres she did not care about, and if she went to any of her favourite haunts there was the chance of her running up against Warner at an inopportune moment. If she happened to be talking to some old friend, or to any one who had chanced to fall in with her, of course Warner would have thought such conduct on the part of his bride-elect not only ill-timed and improper, but deserving

the strongest reprobation he had it in his power to administer. Not that she cared a straw about the man, only she did not wish anything to occur which might have the effect of breaking off the match. Once married to him she would show him which was the best horse ; for it was her firm intention and resolve to wear the continuations, whether he liked it or not. And he was just the sort of sentimental wishy-washy fellow who would submit to pass under the conjugal yoke without a murmur or a word, unless he had become champagne valiant, and could summon up sufficient resolution to engage in a dubious warfare, in which the chances were ten to one that he got worsted.

Horace Warner was one of those who have given a meaning and a position in the dictionaries to the word uxorious. Generally such men are easily led and still more easily governed. It is the man who is strong-minded enough to run away to his club, or to pack up his portmanteau and go to Paris for a week that subjugates an unruly wife. But Horace Warner was far from being amongst the number of the despots.

The time passed slowly, and the book Agnes had taken up was heavy reading. She fell asleep, and woke up again with a start and a shiver. She had had a ghastly dream. She thought in her vision that she saw Melmoth, the astrologer, hacking Milani limb from limb.

Trembling violently at this horrible nightmare, she looked at her watch. It was exactly twelve. This coincidence made her shudder afresh, because she had

heard that midnight dreams had always a peculiar signification. By an effort throwing off the low nervous feeling which was creeping and crawling over her, she rang the bell for Wilkins to dress her, intending to go at once to Matty Wood's. When she got there she found the usual miscellaneous assemblage, amongst whom she speedily picked out Charley Dicks.

"Have you found him?" she asked anxiously.

"No. But I have done what is just as good. I have heard of him."

"Where?" she demanded.

"Down Whitechapel way. Before I came here I dropped in at Bill Tupper's, which is a favourite crib of Warner's, you know, and I met some one there who told me that he had seen him in the City with the Birmingham giant. Some sparring is coming off I believe, and he has backed the giant. My informant heard him say that he should be at Barns's at four o'clock in the morning."

"Thank God you have found him," replied Agnes. "I don't care now I know his relations have not got hold of him. That was all I was afraid of. I suppose now the only thing we can do is to kill the time in the way most agreeable to ourselves, and meet again at Barns's at four."

"Exactly," replied Mr. Dicks. "If you should want me before, by any chance, you will find me somewhere about the 'Market."

Agnes nodded, and walking up to the bar, spoke to the proprietress of the establishment, with whom she was on friendly terms—

"I have cut your friend Kate to-night, Matty," said Agnes.

"So I see," replied Mrs. Wood. "I'm not at all sorry for it. I haven't opened a single bottle of sham' to-night. I wish you'd kid some fellows on, will you?"

"All right; I'm just in the humour for it."

As she spoke, two young men entered the place, and looking at Agnes, appeared much struck with her. Matty Wood immediately gave Agnes "the office" by a contraction of the eyelid. Agnes retired a little way, and spoke to one of the waiters. She did this in order that the new arrivals might ask Matty who she was. They were quickly informed, and although they were not personally acquainted with her, they knew her well enough by reputation. A moment afterwards the Nun came in with a tiny terrier dog under her shawl. Its dainty little limbs were carefully enveloped in a coat. Putting it down on the counter, she said—

"Look after Dotty, Matty, will you?"

"Come along, Totsum," said Matty, fondling the dog, which certainly deserved all her admiration.

"Oh! it's you, old fellow!" exclaimed Letty, recognising one of the two men who had preceded her.

"I hope so," he replied. "I am not aware that I have lost my individuality. How are you, little woman?"

"Oh! as jolly as possible, now I've met you. I was looking about for a victim."

"I feel honoured by the selection," he replied gallantly.

"Do you know that woman over there?" he added, in a low tone of voice.

"Where?—There! I should think so. That's an old friend of mine. I did not see her until you pointed her out."

"I wish you would introduce my friend to her, then."

"Certainly not!" replied the Nun. "I am not going to find men for women. Let them get them themselves."

Seeing Letty, Agnes moved over to her, and they were soon making those well-known familiar inquiries as to the state of one another's bodily health which are customary among people in every walk of life.

"Now, old fellow!" exclaimed the Nun, addressing her acquaintance, "you'll have to stand something; you can't enjoy my society for nothing."

"Do you want anything?" he asked.

"Never mind! Perhaps I have things for the good of the establishment; it doesn't matter to you—all you have to do is to pay for it."

"Suppose I haven't any money?" he said, with a smile.

"In that case I shall go and talk to your friend, and hand you over to Agnes."

"I'm hard up," he rejoined. "I left all my tin down at Shorncliffe."

"You had better go and fetch it then," she said.

Going to his friend, she exclaimed—

“ You are a nice gentlemanly sort of fellow, and I shall talk to you. Never mind Agnes Wiloughby ! I’m quite as swell as she is, if I am not so notorious. Suppose we have some Moselle together. It wont hurt you—you are not too lively.”

“ With pleasure,” he replied.

Matty heard the conversation, and opened a couple of bottles in a moment.

But after the Nun had tasted it, she did not approve of it. She exclaimed—

“ I don’t like that ; it’s beastly gooseberry muck. I say, let’s cut this, and go to Kate’s. My brougham is at the door.”

Completely taken by storm, the man to whom she was talking made no objection, and Letty carried him off before Matty’s eyes, much to that amiable and venerable lady’s disgust.

“ There’s a devil for you,” said Matty to Agnes, after they had gone. “ I hate to see her come into the place. She’s sure to get hold of some fellow, and directly she has, she takes him away to spend his money in other places. I don’t like it, I’m d—— if I do.”

Agnes laughed, and endeavoured to pacify the irate Mrs. Wood ; but for some time she refused to be comforted.

The time passed as it usually does in the places of nocturnal resort in which Agnes found amusement and dissipation for a few hours, and a little after three she went to the “ Windham Arms.”

Mr. Dicks had already arrived. A rapid greeting passed between them, and they went to different parts of the room, which, owing to the late hour, was beginning to look empty and desolate in comparison to its state a little while before. It was fully four o'clock when the huge form of the Birmingham Giant, colossal and brawny, loomed in the doorway. He was assisting Horace Warner, who could hardly stand, he was so intoxicated.

"Come along, my pippin—step out, my tulip," he exclaimed in a familiar tone of voice.

Warner was too far gone to recognise Agnes, or anybody else in the room.

"How are you, Brummagem?" exclaimed Mr. Dicks, coming up to that worthy.

"Nicely, thank you, guv'nor; how's yourself?" replied the Giant.

"L—let's have some m—more l—lush!" croaked Warner, in a drunken way.

Charley Dicks slipped a couple of sovereigns into the giant's hand, and whispered to him—

"Take him out and put him in a cab. Herc's two quid for you. Kyus!"—(that is, don't make any noise over it).

"I tumble!" said the Giant, who proceeded to obey his instructions to the letter. Accordingly, he removed his patron from the room, and was closely followed by Agnes and Charley Dicks.

Had the Birmingham giant been aware that Mr. Warner was going to be married the next morning, he would have done all he could to have kept him away from Agnes; because his knowledge

of that young lady's character, slight as it was, was nevertheless amply sufficient to inform him that he would have very little chance of fully reaping the golden harvest of which he had only, as yet, cut a few shocks of very auriferous corn. Being the farmer of this rich estate, he had carefully stacked the produce of his ground as far as he had gone, and his subordinates had come in for some uncommonly handsome gleanings. But though the giant was corporeally strong, his brain was not of corresponding vigour, and he failed to gain the insight into the future that a visit to Melmoth, the astrologer, would have afforded him.

Tell the man to go to my house," exclaimed Agnes to Dicks, "and jump in yourself. I am in too great a rage to speak to anybody. I can't bear the sight of the brute."

The cab rattled off, and the Giant returned to the public-house to finish his booze, saying, in an under tone, "They may have him now. I ain't made a bad thing of it, not by no means. I've eased him altogether of close upon five-and-twenty pun—a good day's work. And now that bloke, Charley Dicks, give me two couters. It's fine. I ran the rule, and collared his watch in the passage outside ; that'll go up for a fiver ! He's worth a Australian nugget to me. I wouldn't part with him on no account."

When Agnes got Warner home, she laid him on the sofa where he had passed a night on a former occasion ; he was insensibly intoxicated, and had evidently been drinking all day.

"Is it not filthy?" said Agnes.

"Never mind," replied Dieks. "You can alter that when you've got him under your thumb."

"Yes, and I will too, you may take your dying oath of that," she answered with emphatic intonation and an expression of countenance that plainly indicated her disgust at her future husband's propensities.

"Feel in his pockets, Charley, and see if he's got the licensee."

Mr. Dieks did so, and to his satisfaction discovered the document he was in search of.

"I am glad of that," she exclaimed. "Now let us settle our programme for to-morrow. The enemy know that we have selected All Saints' So won't it be better to go somewhere else?"

"Change the venue, as the lawyers say," replied Mr. Dieks. "No, I think not, and I'll tell you why. As we shall have to start from here to-morrow morning, we shall gain nothing by going to any other place, the house is safe to be watched, and some one will follow us. We must go as if we were not afraid of anybody, and if Lionel Cooper or any one else says anything to us we can baffle them. I don't see how they can stop us. He has a right to marry any one he chooses, and if he selects you, so much the better for you."

"I shall leave it to you," she replied. "But I can't help feeling as if things were not going right. It may be my nervousness."

"Of course it is. I'll bet you what you like we'll lick them. Anyhow, I'll try all I know."

Mr. Dicks' confident manner had a slightly reassuring effect upon Agnes.

"You wont go back to your place to-night?" she queried.

"Not I. I'm like a jockey just before a race. I shall sleep in the stable, so that no hoccusing shall take place. There might be an abduction; leave me alone, I wasn't born yesterday," replied Mr. Dicks, with a knowing wink.

"Take my shawl then," she exclaimed, unfastening a handsome cashmere, and handing it to him.

"I have some cigars," he added, "and I shall be as right as a trivet. You will want the sleep more than I, so you'd better turn in."

Wishing him good night and a pleasant vigil, Agnes retired to prepare for the events of the morrow. She slept soundly enough, but strange to say her slumber was again disturbed by the singular vision of Melmoth, the astrologer, and Milani, the latter of whom, as before, was being hacked to pieces by the former, who was armed with a murderous hatchet. She awoke quivering all over like an aspen.

After her dream, and owing to the fright it occasioned her, Agnes found sleep impossible. She turned uneasily in her bed, and finding that it was broad daylight, she got up, and wrapped in the capacious folds of her dressing-gown, she amused herself by brushing her lovely hair, which she trailed through her fingers with a fond affection. At eight o'clock Wilkins came up to call her mistress, but found that she had dispensed with her

warm water and was nearly dressed. On entering the drawing-room Agnes found Mr. Dicks, in spite of his boasting, fast asleep in an arm-chair. Horace Warner showed by his deep and heavy breathing that he had not as yet slept off the fumes of the wine he had taken. Going up to Dicks, she touched him on the shoulder. It seemed to him, in his somnolent state, to resemble the tap of a bailiff, to which delicate manipulation he had been accustomed in his younger daye. Waking up with precipitation, he exclaimed, "No you don't, old boy." But perceiving Agnes, he collected himself, and said, "Caught me at it, eh ? We are ail a nodding family, I think. How's the Boy ?— lively ? Let him bide, then. Tell your slavey to let me have some tea, will you ? Hot and strong. No milk or sugar. Where do you keep your brandy ?"

It was evident that Mr. Dicks wished to fortify the inner man ; his wants being supplied, he said, "We must wake him up. He has to tell us what he did yesterday, and whether he made it all right with the parson. We must leave here at half-past ten ; we can all go in the brougham. You and the Boy inside, I on the box with the jarvey."

Agnes, who had been looking out of the window, went to Mr. Dicks, and said softly, "There are one or two fellows in the street I don't half like the look of."

"Just what I expected," he replied. "What did I tell you last night ? I knew they would do all they could to dodge us, and you see I wasn't far out."

"I wish the thing was over," said Agnes. "I expect it will turn out a sell after all. If it does come off all right—and I tell you frankly I, for one, shall not be disappointed if it doesn't—I shall start for Paris directly."

"You will want some of the needful, won't you?" he asked; "the Boy isn't flush, I know. He came to me the day before yesterday for fifty, and I let him have it. Have you popped your diamonds?"

"You know as well as I do," replied Agnes, "that the best part of them are at Solomon's. I only keep just what I actually want. I suppose I forgot to tell you I screwed five hundred out of Lionel Cooper."

"The Boy's stepfather!" ejaculated Mr. Dicks. "That is fine. How did you work it?"

Agnes recapitulated the scene between herself and Lionel Cooper, at which Mr. Dicks laughed loudly, looked at her with great and unmistakeable admiration, and exclaimed, "That's as 'cute a thing as ever I heard of. You'll do!"

"It's time this kid was blinking," he resumed, after a pause. "I tell you what we'll do. Send for sixpenn'orth of chloric æther. It's a good thing for the nerves, after the sort of buster he's had. It'll steady him if anything will!"

"I have some gentian in the house," said Agnes. "You can mix the two together, and make a pick-me-up of them."

This was done and given to Warner, who was with difficulty aroused. It did not appear to have much effect upon him. By dint of repeated ques-

tioning, Mr. Dicks elicited that he had gone to the church and made the necessary arrangements ; but soon after he had fallen in with the Birmingham giant, who had decoyed him into the wilds of Whitechapel, from whence he did not emerge until they met him at the Windham Arms. This was his unvarnished tale. After hearing it, Dicks thought it better to let him lie still, without any further interruption, until the brougham came to the door. Agnes dressed herself in the costume she thought most becoming. She wore a white muslin dress without any flounces ; they were not in fashion then—a white shawl, a white bonnet, with strings to match, and lavender gloves. The time glided quickly by, and when the carriage arrived, it was found necessary to lift Warner into it ; he was so shaky that he couldn't stand without support.

"Here's a go !" said Mr. Dicks ; "I hope to God his pins will hold him when we get him into the kirk !"

"I hope so too, I'm sure. Wouldn't it be better to put it off till to-morrow ?"

"Don't think so. He's like an eel, so cursed slippery," replied Charley Dicks. "Might change his mind. No ; take him while he's in the humour, as the song says."

When the brougham was freighted, the men that Agnes had noticed loafing about the premises followed it at a quick jog-trot. This was not remarked either by her or Dicks. Warner seemed perfectly unconscious of what he was going to do. Drink had so benumbed his faculties that he was

incapable of the least mental exertion. If ever a lamb went to the slaughter—always admitting his cognate qualities—he did. When the church was reached the party alighted, and Warner contrived, with the support rendered him by Mr. Dicks, to totter through the yard and into the sacred edifice. Agnes wondered how he would get through the responses, for there was a look of blank vacuity about his face which was anything but reassuring. After a few words with the verger, the clerk, the sacristan, or whatever name the man-of-all-work in a High Church goes by, they were marshalled in proper order, and sent up to the altar. This carries out the sacrificial idea of the lamb going to be immolated. But just as the clergyman was looking for the well-worn place in his book, a man stepped forward from behind a pillar which had hitherto concealed his body, and walking hastily up to the altar rails, exclaimed to the parson, “I cannot allow this ceremony to proceed.”

It was Lionel Cooper. He did not look at Agnes, although he cast a look of commiseration mingled with disgust upon Warner.

“On what grounds do you interfere?” inquired the parson.

“It would hardly be compatible with your sacred office I should think to marry a drunken man,” replied Lionel Cooper.

“Dear me,” exclaimed the clergyman, “is this so?”

“Judge for yourself!”

The half-closed eyes, the silly look, the flushed

and dirty face, the deep breathing, the inability to stand alone, revealed the truth of the allegation.

"Good people," said the clergyman, "you must postpone the marriage you have in contemplation ; and let me caution you against making a mockery of the holy forms of the Church, for such a dereliction of duty may involve you in serious consequences. Depart in peace. I may not officiate."

With a muttered curse Mr. Dicks began to walk down the aisle with Warner hanging on his arm. Boiling over with rage and vexation, Agnes followed him, proudly holding her head erect so that Lionel Cooper should not see how much she felt the triumph he had gained over her. And yet this occurrence was what her intuitions had warned her of. She had had her presentiments that she would not be married to Horace Warner as had been arranged ; but she comforted herself with the thought that the ceremony was only postponed for a short time. She resolved that every care should be taken of the bridegroom, and that the plea of intoxication should not again be raised as a bar to their union. She was a strong minded, passionate woman, possessed of great determination ; and to be thwarted in anything she undertook, however trivial, was like gall and wormwood to her. But while it enraged her beyond measure, her ill success always inspired her with fresh ardour, and she became an infinitely more dangerous antagonist after her defeat than she had been before. She vowed that she would leave no stone unturned to achieve her purpose, and she never

rested until the object she had set her heart on was accomplished. To marry Warner was now her one great purpose. Before, she did not care so much about it. Certain circumstances had concurred to render such a match eligible; yet, desirable as it was, if Milani had relented and offered to make her his wife, she would willingly and with cheerfulness have relinquished Warner for the more accomplished, more talented, and more agreeable Italian. The latter had spurned her advances and driven her from him, so she fell back upon Warner. When the fates conspired to interfere in this matter she grew furious, and then all the native energy of her strongly-developed character was revealed. Her set purpose was magnified into an object of the greatest ambition, and nothing would have been sufficiently cogent to turn her from it. Lionel Cooper might smile at her now and think that he had discomfited her. So he had for the present, but the future is in no man's hand. That is the concern of Heaven alone. Man gropes like a mole in the dark, and knows not what the next day may bring about, or tomorrow's sun be destined to reveal. She marched with a queenly step, like some Norma prepared for death. She was not so much occupied with her own thoughts as to be neglectful of Warner, upon whom her eyes were firmly fixed. Mr. Dicks held him by the shoulder in a firm grasp, and he tottered rather than walked out of the building. In the street, to her surprise, she saw Milani. He was standing on one side of the iron gate which

allowed egress from the church. On the other were half-a-dozen rough-looking men. Among them she recognised those who had watched her house in the morning. She wondered what the meaning of it could be. She dreaded that some mischief was in the air, that some untoward event was going to happen. Milani's presence at such a time and in such a place incensed her beyond measure. He was evidently doing all that lay in his power to insult and annoy her. The hot blood rushed in a full tide to her cheeks and made them flush crimson. She could have shot the Italian dead on the spot. She could have flown at him and overwhelmed him with abuse. But prudence restrained her. Gulping down her rage, although the effort half-choked her, she passed through the gate and stood in the street. The rough-looking men formed themselves into a circle as if to prevent Mr. Dicks' egress. They looked alternately upon Warner and Milani. At this moment, when Dicks and Agnes were silently regarding one another as if asking for some explanation of this strange scene, Lionel Cooper's voice was heard in the churchyard. It rang out clear and shrill, "Seize him."

There could be no doubt that these words were addressed to the rough men, and were a command to them to lay violent hands upon Horace Warner. If any suspicion as to their import had lingered in either Charley Dicks' or Agnes's mind, it was soon dissipated, for with threatening demeanour the men advanced closer to Charley Dicks. Letting Warner fall down on the pavement, which he did not fail to

do directly the support that had formerly maintained him was taken away, Dicks let out a left-handed blow at the foremost ruffian which sent him flying into the gutter. One of his companions was similarly treated by his right. But while he was thus bravely defending himself against such enormous odds, Milani crept stealthily behind him and raised Warner's almost inanimate body in his arms. He was making off with his burden, when Agnes perceived the artifice which he had successfully put in operation. She had omitted to notice it before, owing to her faculties being engrossed by the unequal combat that Mr. Dicks was waging with the hirelings of the opposite party, who had cleverly stolen a march upon them, and had apparently by their superior cunning placed the game entirely in their own hands. She was about to rush after Milani and impede his progress as best she could with those weapons nature has given to woman—in other words, *unguibus et rostro*—when Lionel Cooper perceiving her intention, emerged from the churchyard, and seizing her from behind, held her arms tightly behind her back, thus preventing her from making any diversion against Milani. Whilst pinned securely, she had the extreme mortification to see the Italian place Warner in a four-wheel cab which was standing close by, as if in accordance with some pre-arrangement, and after saying something to the driver, jump in after his captive. The cab almost instantly drove off. With her woman's wit naturally sharpened by the stirring events which

were taking place, she thought of glancing at the back of the cab in order to see its number. To her astonishment the space in which the number should have appeared was carefully draped with a piece of black crape. As this harmonized with the colour of the cab it did not excite much attention. It had most likely been done by Milani's orders. The intriguing nature of the Italian would at once think of such an obvious mode of discovering Warner's whereabouts as the number of the cab in which he was driven away, and he had, with his usual sagacious promptitude, bribed the driver to conceal the tell-tale figures. The horse of the cab was a white one. This was of no help, for how many cab horses in London are white? Certainly an immense number. Giving up the attempt to trace the cab either by its number or by some peculiarity striking to the eye, she turned her attention to Mr. Dicks. The ruffians who had attacked him perceiving that he was a formidable opponent, and not liking the force and precision with which his blows were put in, and noticing in addition that the prize for which they were fighting had been secured by strategy, they withdrew in a body and disappeared down a back street. When Mr. Dicks, proudly triumphant, turned round to look after Warner, an expression of blank dismay took possession of his countenance. Warner gone! When? how? and where? He inclined his head towards Agnes for some explanation of this phenomenon. Here a new surprise awaited him. Lionel Cooper still retained his hold of her. A

small crowd had collected by this time, and a lethargic policeman made his appearance. Directly Agnes saw him she craved his assistance in a loud voice. "This man," she exclaimed, "has assaulted me. I give him in charge."

The policeman compelled Mr. Cooper to release Agnes, and inquired if he had any defence to make. He entered into a long rambling statement, which the policeman interrupted, saying that it would be better to adjourn to the station-house, where the inspector could judge the case upon its own merits. Mr. Cooper acquiesced in this—a cab was procured, and the party went to Vine-street. At the police-station the inspector on duty, after hearing Agnes's charge and Mr. Cooper's exculpation, said it was a case for arrangement, and advised the parties to settle it amicably. This Agnes firmly refused to do. The inspector finding his efforts at mediation were useless, took the charge, and asked Mr. Cooper if he was prepared with bail; he replied that he was not at that moment, but that if he were permitted to write or send to his friends he could procure bail to any amount. He was allowed writing materials. Messengers were placed at his disposal, but until the arrival of his bail he was locked up in one of the cells, a proceeding which Agnes regarded with the utmost satisfaction. Mr. Dicks and Agnes left the station together, and walked up Piccadilly towards the house of the former.

"Licked, by Jove," exclaimed Mr. Dicks.

"I don't care so much now I have locked that man up," replied Agnes.

"Why did you do it?" asked Dicks, with a look of peculiar meaning.

"For revenge, of course."

"Not at all. I will give you credit for possessing more sense than that. Shall I tell you what I thought your object was?"

"If you like," she replied, indifferently.

"I imagined that your thoughts were identical with mine. They will whip him off out of England, I thought, in a jiffy, and they will give us the devil's own work to rout him out again. He wont go without Lionel Cooper. Milani—the scoundrel—can't leave the country; his musical engagements prevent him. Ergo, Lionel Cooper will be his travelling companion. But by locking Lionel Cooper up, or by detaining him somehow or other, we may find Warner before this little police row is settled. Don't you see? At all events it gives us time to turn round, and collect our senses a bit. That dodge outside the church was one of the cleverest things I know of. My head can't be so good as it used to be, or I should have thought of a plant like that. But we'll be one with them, yet. One thing's clear—Warner will not be allowed to stay in London. He knows too many people, and it is too near you. The country is too dull for him. They would not keep him there a week; so the odds are that they mean to take him to Paris."

"Perhaps you are right," replied Agnes; "men are always cooler than women. I lost my temper while you were reasoning. Suppose they take him

to Paris to-morrow, which they most likely will do —what shall we do?"

"Of course you do not intend to appear against Lionel Cooper?"

"Certainly not; I should get nothing by it if I did. We should both be exposed and he would be fined five shillings or something, and the *Daily Telegraph* would have a leader upon it. No, I shall not appear."

"And you don't feel in the least disposed to give up this boy?"

"Give him up! why, my dear fellow, I would rather die than give him up. I will follow him to the end of the world. I swear by everything that I hold most sacred, that I will marry Horace Warner! I know I shall do it too; nothing can prevent me. It may take me some time to accomplish it, but that only makes the chase more exciting, and the object of your pursuit more worth having when you get it. I am not one of those lazy women who lie down on their backs, and wait for pigs ready roasted to tumble into their mouths. I want pigs as well as they do; but I have sense enough to know that I shall have to catch my pigs first of all, and roast them myself afterwards."

"That's right; that's the way to get on and do a thing," replied Mr. Dicks. "We'll hook him. I shouldn't mind a trip over to Paris, and I'll go with you. To-day I'll occupy myself in finding out what they intend to do. I know one or two fellows up in Vine-street, at the station, and I'll make it worth their while to ferret out one or two things for me.

We had better separate till to-morrow, when I will come to you. Put part of your things together, and be ready to start for Jerusalem, or anywhere, at a moment's notice."

Agnes wished him good-bye, and he added, as he returned her valediction, "You can't say I'm such a bad pal."

"No," thought Agnes, "few men are when it is their interest to be so. If I don't marry Warner he wont get his five thousand pounds. So I have nothing much to thank him for if he does make himself useful in this emergency."

She returned home, brooding over the misfortunes of the morning, but by no means cast down—rather confident of ultimate victory than otherwise, and finding great consolation in thinking of the astrologer and his prediction. Hers was a superstitious mind, and she looked upon Melmoth's vaticinations as little short of oracular. Placing a firm belief in the propheey he had made, she never questioned the fact of her marriage with Horace Warner. Her chagrin arose principally from having been outwitted by Lionel Cooper in conjunction with Milani. It was particularly galling to her to think that the singer should have numbered himself amongst her enemies, and that he should have been base enough to do battle against her who had not offended him in any material way such as a man ought to wish to avenge. During the whole of that day Charley Dicks worked indefatigably.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PURSUIT.

AT twelve o'clock the next morning Mr. Charles Dicks made his appearance at Agnes's house, near the Finchley Road. He found that she had just risen, and was breakfasting in her boudoir. Her matinal meal consisted of fairy-like food, in the shape of two larks, delicately roasted, and served up on a woodcock sort of toast, garnished with lemon peel and rich gravy. She drank chocolate. When Mr. Dicks, who may now be fairly called her *fidus Achates*, was announced, she ordered him to be instantly admitted ; and the faithless Wilkins, over whom the storm was impending, but who as yet was unconscious of the doom about to be awarded to her treachery, asked him into her mistress's sanctum.

"How do you do?" exclaimed Mr. Dicks.

"Don't ask me such infernally stupid questions," replied Agnes ; "can't you see I am all right? Just sit down and tell me all about what you have been doing."

Mr. Dicks submissively took a chair, muttering something about the decencies of society and the usages that civilization entails upon those who are fortunate enough to flourish under its auspices. When his smothered grumbling was at an end, he endeavoured to enlighten the imperiouslady who, like a king of France, had been almost obliged to wait.

"I know you have something good to tell me," she said before he began. "I dreamt about three white mice last night, and that's a sign of luck."

"Is it?" said Mr. Dicks. "In that case I shall buy half-a-dozen and look at them well before I go to bed, and if I dream of the whole kit I suppose I shall find a gold mine. It's better than a cat scratching money. Well, I was going to tell you I have found out all about Warner. They took him to Fenton's Hotel in St. James's-street, where he is now. But they wont let him go out of doors for fear somebody should see him. They are whacking religion into him as hard as they can, and representing what a frightful ass he would be to marry you when he might do so much better, and a lot more of the same sort. It doesn't seem to make much impression on his lordship, who, the waiter—pal of mine—told me sat all the morning smoking and drinking brandy and bitters. He's got over his drunk; and the waiter (call him Fog—ain't his name, but a nick he's got) heard him cursing and going on anyhow at being shut up. He likes the idea of going to Paris, but he swears he'll come back to you in a week or two. He wrote a letter to you and asked Milani to send it. The Italian has been with him the best part of the time, and because he said he would not, Warner smashed the place up. All the windows went like a lot of talc, and the glass and the chairs and tables. There was an awful shindy. They only quieted him by threatening to lock him up in a lunatic asylum. Lionel Cooper got out yesterday on bail, and was discharged this

morning because nobody appeared against him ; and he told Warner flatly that if he didn't go on in a more Christian-like way he'd move for a writ of *De Lunatico*. Fog was outside the door, and heard Warner say—‘He might do as he liked and be d—— ; but if he did not shut up he would punch his head.’ So finding they could not bounce him they have gone on the other tack and tried to soap him over. The end of it all is that he's going to Paris tonight with Lionel Cooper. It isn't likely they would go by Newhaven and Dieppe. That's a route that is cheap and nasty. It's longer than the other, and for the sake of a pound or two they won't go that way. I have told Fog to pipe (*i.e.*, look about and listen), and he says he will. My idea is that they will go by way of Dover and Calais from the South Eastern at London Bridge. That's the mail route, and the train leaves in the evening at half-past eight, I think. You and I had better patronise the same conveyance. I don't think it would be prudent to make any demonstration to-day. They are all on their guard, and that crafty Italian knows what he is about. I owe him one and I'll square it with him some day. Once in Paris Lionel Cooper wont exercise such a strict surveillance over the boy, and we shall have more elbow room. Keep up your pecker. We shall lick them into fits yet.”

“I believe that,” replied Agnes ; “and I am much obliged to you for doing all this. The only thing that annoys me is, to think that I have been bested

by that beast Milani. You know the chaff about him and me, so I don't mind talking to you. It does me good to have some one I can jaw at."

"I'll be your barber's block for half-an-hour with pleasure if you will tell Wilkins to bring me some of that pink champagne I sent you, and give me your gracious permission to smoke."

"You know how I have loved that man, Charley," resumed Agnes after a pause. "I don't care that for him now, though; so don't you think it. Did once, though; I pretty nearly went mad over him, and see how the beggar's treated me. I declare to you, when I think over it, I hate myself so much that I could tear my eyes out for ever having been so mean as to creep and crawl to him as I have done. Why he should have taken part with Cooper against me, I can't quite make out. I think it is only his low way of revenging himself because I smashed him up the other day when he cheeked me."

"Never mind him. We'll tackle him when we come back. As Mrs. Horace Warner you can hurt him more than you can as plain Agnes Willoughby."

Agnes made no reply. She leant her head upon her hand, and appeared sunk in bitter reflections. At length she said—

"You are quite right, Charley; the man is or ought to be below my notice; only, when you have once loved anything it is so hard to tear your soul away from it. I cannot do it all at once, I must achieve it by degrees."

After this she once more plunged into a reverie.

Charley Dicks smoked on in silence, occasionally sipping his tinted wine with gusto and satisfaction. Suddenly Agnes started up and cried passionately—

“The fact is, a loose woman ought to have no feelings; if she has, she only gets them trampled upon. She should have no heart; if she has, it only beats in order that it may be more thoroughly and effectually crushed. A woman who does what I do ought to be as hard as a bit of flint. Those who are as hard as nails get on; those who are not get shoved against the wall, and serve them right too.”

This cynical burst amused Mr. Dicks; but, with his usual placidity of manner, he continued to smoke until he arrived at a pitch of unruffled serenity. Shortly after which he took his leave, making an arrangement to meet again at six o'clock, so as to be in readiness for the night mail to the Continent. Agnes packed up a few things which she thought she should require, and ordering her carriage, took a blow in the Park in order to dissipate the gloom that had been gathering over her. In the evening two people might have been discovered standing on the platform of the railway station. They had deposited their rugs upon the places they meant to occupy. They had tipped the guard, they had supplied themselves with all the things necessary for a long journey, and were waiting outside the carriage in preference to being cooped up inside before it was absolutely obligatory for them to do so. Those two people were Mr. Dicks

and Agnes Willoughby. They were on the look-out for Mr. Lionel Cooper and Horace Warner. About five minutes before the time for starting they arrived. Agnes immediately stepped into the carriage. Mr. Dicks pulled his hat over his eyes, and remained ~~on~~ the watch. Warner seemed excited with the prospect of the journey before him. A railway station always had an exhilarating effect upon him. He saw his luggage carefully bestowed by the porter, and then he took possession of a carriage in the centre of the train, not far from that in which Agnes was. Had he been aware of her presence he would, no doubt, have shifted his quarters with alacrity; but he was far from dreaming, even remotely, of her being so close to him. Lionel Cooper appeared satisfied with himself, and in high spirits, and the two laughed and talked together in a manner that showed they had forgotten their differences and were now upon good terms with one another. Mr. Dicks remained upon the platform until the last moment, so that he might certify himself that the chase did not slip out again, and, changing their minds, return to town. He took his place opposite to Agnes. The guard slammed the doors, whistled, ran frantically up the platform, and the huge length of the train creaked and groaned and slid out of the station. In the carriage in which Agnes was might have been discovered the usual types of continental travelling. There was the hirsute pard-like traveller going out for some Manchester house. The itinerant foreigner who talked excellent French and imperfect English, dirty about the face and shining

as to the sleeves of his coat, reeking of *Le Quartier* Leicester Square. The dignified moneyed man who wished to further the interests of commerce and to promote Joint Stock Banking in France, with a strong desire to make the acquaintance of a celebrated man, the recognised pioneer of progress, Sir, and one of the most advanced liberals of the age. A contributor to the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, a most excellent magazine, Sir.” And the long-whiskered, silky-moustached gentleman who ran over to Paris every now and then,—“because he liked it, you know—Paris was such a jolly place for a week or two. Do the Boulogne Wood and the races at *Longchamps*.”

The train had not gone much past New Cross, before Charley Dicks looked at Agnes, and said, in a low tone—

“Shall I put the poor beggars out of their misery?”
She laughed and replied—

“Yes. Light up.”

He took out his cigar-case, struck a fuzee with a sharp crack peculiar to those little fire-machines when at the point of ignition, and was soon blowing a cloud.

The four types of continental travelling looked inexpressibly gratified. Up to the present time they had been glaring at Agnes with the ferocity of demons doomed to everlasting torment with an eternal Abraham refusing to moisten their parched tongues. Now the muscles of their demoniac countenances relaxed, and they evidenced by their manner that tobacco was the one touch of nature which

made the whole carriage kin. Hands sought pockets, and extracted cigars of various manufactures. Mr. Dicks was looked upon as a public benefactor, and Agnes as an angel of light. Conversation now became general, and the men were happy and comfortable. Before they had been wretched and miserable. They had imagined that Agnes, like most English ladies, objected to smoke, and that they would be therefore deprived of the chance of indulging in the favourite pastime. Their minds were inexpressibly relieved, and the foreigner who reeked so would have kissed the hand of that "lovely Ingleesh mees" who did not object to tobacco smoke. The journey passed in the utmost harmony. The gentleman who liked Paris because it was such a jolly place for a week or so, made himself particularly agreeable to Agnes, which he had every opportunity of doing, as he sat next to her.

Charley Dicks smiled at this, and said to himself—

"It will take him all his time to get a rise out of her."

Agnes flirted in the most approved fashion with her new acquaintance, and interested him in spite of himself. He began to think himself very fortunate in having so fascinating a travelling companion; wondered whether Mr. Dicks were the husband or the brother, although he inclined to the latter opinion, because he took his advances so quietly, and pulled away at his cigar with the equanimity of a stoic, not to say a misogynist. At

train steamed on to the jetty at Dover, and
ving freight, who, in the darkness of a

night without a moon, descended the pier-steps amidst the noise of French and English oaths, the rattle of luggage, the escape of steam, and the other noises incidental to a night-mail steamer.

Agnes and Mr. Dicks were careful not to run up against Lionel Cooper and Warner. They did not wish to be seen by either of them. Identification would have been rather difficult on such a dark night as they were favoured with ; more especially as Agnes wore a thick Maltese lace veil. They stepped on board the steamer fearlessly, and took up a position near the wheel. As the passage was a short one they preferred doing so to going down-stairs, which at any time is the reverse of pleasant. Soon the engines were put in motion. Hoarse cries from the shore were responded to by hoarser ones on board, as the boat put to sea. Gaily she cleft the silent billows, and pushed through the seething deep, leaving a long train of phosphorescent sparkles in the wake. Agnes was not sorry to see the lights of Calais harbour. Her stomachic equilibrium had been threatened more than once by that terrible *mal de mer* which affects a queen quite as much as it did an Agnes Willoughby. The refreshment room at the Calais station was hailed with the utmost delight, and Agnes insisted upon going in.

"We can sit in a corner," she said ; "he won't see us."

So Mr. Dicks was overruled. They chose a table at the end near the fireplace, and a good way off the buffet. A waiter brought them some of the

wishy-washy bouillon that is better than nothing after a sea-voyage, and a couple of teal, upon which they made a substantial repast. Lionel Cooper and Warner stood at the counter and drank a bottle of champagne without eating anything. Then they went away to take their places, which is a very stupid thing to do on a French railway, as the Gallic officials have an unpleasant habit of putting as many people as they can into one carriage. They ought to belong to a sort of Thug Society for the Promotion of Suffocation and the Better Encouragement of Syncope. They have no idea of giving you a carriage to yourself, or half a one, even. They jam and crowd until you can't move your legs, the result of which is cramp, the end of which is strong language. By a preconcerted arrangement, the four men who had come down from London to Dover with Agnes travelled to Paris with them. They all got places in the same carriage, and the fumigating process again commenced. When that was accomplished to everybody's satisfaction, a little sleep was deemed advisable. Caps of every shade and colour were produced, and in nursery parlance pigs were driven to market at an astonishing rate. Agnes went to sleep along with the rest. She woke up with "'R-'r-ras, 'R-'r-ras," ringing in her ears. They had reached Arras, and the sleepy porters were informing the still more sleepy travellers of the fact. Another sleep, and then they came to Crèil. Paris was now not far distant. When they arrived at their destination Mr. Dicks hastily got out of the carriage, telling Agnes to wait on the

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platform for him. He was gone five minutes ; at the expiration of that time he returned.

" Well ?" ejaculated Agnes.

" Gone to the Louvre," he replied. " Heard old Cooper tell the jarvey."

" Shall we go there, too ?"

" No ; we'll go to the Grand Hotel. Wont do to be too close to them."

They called a carriage, had their luggage stacked, and were driven to their hotel. An inquiry at the *caisse* resulted in their getting a handsome suite of rooms, and they went to lie down for an hour or two before they had breakfast.

Lionel Cooper had, during the journey, judiciously refrained from inculcating high moral precepts into Warner. He had contented himself with eulogizing the beauties and the attractions of Paris, and even dilating upon the surpassing loveliness of the Parisian women. This evidenced his tact.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CASINO IN THE RUE CADET.

ABOUT the middle of the day on which they arrived in Paris, Agnes and Mr. Dicks were sitting together in the reading-saloon attached to the hotel. They had just finished breakfast, and they thought it expedient to arrange their plan of action during their stay in Paris.

"My idea," said Mr. Dicks, "is to let him have his fling for a day or two."

"I don't think so," replied Agnes. "I should like him to know that I am close to him, and I am positive he will fly to me when he knows it."

"I am not so sure of that."

"You are very clever in your way, but I understand the man better than you do."

"In that case I am sorry I spoke. What shall I do?"

"Go to the Louvre, and find out what they intend doing this evening. Isn't there a place called the *Mabille*? Perhaps they will go there. You may take your oath of one thing, old Cooper will keep him at it. He will take him from place to place, and try and introduce him to a lot of Frenchwomen just to keep his mind occupied, and make him forget me."

"Which you don't approve of?"

"I should think not. I should like to catch him with a Frenchwoman."

"What would you do?"

"Very likely give him a cut in the eye; as likely as not," replied Agnes.

"And get pulled up before one of the swells at the *Hotel de Ville*. Violence is always a bad game."

"No it is not. But never mind. It is not worth talking about. I am sure the best thing you can do is to go to the place they are putting up at, and see if you can't find out something about their movements."

"All right," replied Dicks, putting on his hat. "I say," he added, "what's the proper stuff to drink over here?"

"I don't know. You had better ask downstairs."

"You're a nice one to help a lame dog over a stile," muttered Mr. Dicks, as he left the room.

Agnes amused herself in a most thoroughly English manner during his absence, by examining the *Journal pour Rire*, and the *Charivari*, and contrasting the cuts with those which appear in our serial illustrated papers. She criticized everything that came before her notice, from the chambermaid who demanded a franc for a piece of soap, to the telegraphic-bell apparatus, and the paper on the wall. Mr. Dicks was gone an hour, and he came back with a self-congratulatory look, which said as plainly as if he had spoken it, "I have done it. It's all right."

Taking up a position by her side, he exclaimed—
“Found it all out, as pat as possible. Old boy doesn’t know much about Paris, and came down to the clerk at the *caisse*, a decent, florid-looking, light-haired young fellow, who talks English uncommon well. Cooper asked him what was going on, any theatres, casinos, or places like the Argyll or Cremorne. After a long palaver, he pitched upon the *Casino* in the *Rue Cadet*, a place, the clerk told me, something like the Holborn. I worked the clerk stunningly. I swore the old fellow was an absconding bankrupt, and that I was an English detective going after him. We did not want to arrest him all at once, because we thought he had accomplices in Paris, and we wished to sweep down on the whole lot at one go.”

“I told you that was the way to do it,” replied Agnes. “I suppose old Blowhard will go with him to the casino.”

“If he does, Warner is sure to give him the slip, and speak to some woman, and Lionel Cooper wont be finking about leaving him to himself over here; for you may be certain he has not the remotest suspicion of your being in Paris. He imagines you in London, and he is, no doubt, thinking himself a devilish clever fellow, and the saviour of his stepson.”

“About whom,” said Agnes, “he cares in reality as much as you do. I wish you had gone to Doctors’ Commons, and spent a shilling in looking at the will of Warner’s father. I’m sure that Lionel Cooper has some contingent interest in it,

which Warner's marrying would knock on the head."

"Very likely. I wont say you are not right."

"If I see Warner and Lionel Cooper together to-night," exclaimed Agnes, "I shall wait until they separate, and then I shall go up to Horace and take him by storm. I don't think he will mind marrying me over here. If he has any objection, I shall know how to get over it."

"I shall leave you to manage matters when you get alongside of one another again," replied Mr. Dicks. "What will you do this afternoon? Shall we hire a carriage, and go somewhere?"

Agnes felt perfectly confident that if Warner were engaged in conversation with the most fascinating woman in Paris, with a *Madame Doche*, in all the splendour of her beautiful camellias, he would leave her promptly, and pay his court to the one who alone possessed his heart and his affections. He had been forcibly and surreptitiously, as it were, taken away from her when on the point of making her his own for ever. He had repeatedly told her how much he loved her, and how devoted he was to her. He had made her the most costly and magnificent presents, and it was not to be supposed for a moment that so young a man could be so fickle as to perjure himself in every possible way, and desert the mistress of his heart, because a few miles of salt water intervened between them. Agnes's opinion was that he would spring into her arms as soon as he saw her, and be overjoyed at so unexpected a meeting, but one in every way in accord-

ance with his wishes. She dressed herself with elaborate care, but still with great simplicity, and, accompanied by Charley Dicks, went to the casino in the *Rue Cadet*. There was no dancing, it was a promenade night. The room was something like Her Majesty's during one of Jullien's Concerts—a large space in front of the orchestra, with a small background behind it. It was crowded. For some time she walked about without perceiving any trace of him she was in search of ; but she came upon him unexpectedly, standing in a secluded position, doing his best to talk to a Frenchwoman, more remarkable for her size than her beauty, very much resembling the nymphs of the pavement who do so much of an afternoon to deteriorate Regent Street, and make the Quadrant a thoroughfare impossible for respectable females. Lionel Cooper was not with him. The presumption was that he was not far off, probably engaged in a similar occupation to that of his step-son ; for even steady-going married men think themselves privileged in a foreign country to—as Jack says—"shake a loose leg." Warner did not appear to like his fair charmer very much. His imperfect knowledge of the French language made conversation more resemble a lesson with a masculine instructress than the agreeable pastime it ought to have been. Agnes posted herself straight before them, and regarded them attentively for some time ; but although the woman noticed her, Warner did not. Mr. Dicks stood still, anticipating some fun. But he removed himself a little

from Agnes, so that Warner might not, at first, see them together, and surmise that there was complicity between them. He looked upon him as a hare, and did not wish to do anything that might startle so timid a creature. Suddenly, by some chance, just as he had got as far as "*Où demeurez-vous?*" Warner looked up, and his eyes fell upon Agnes. He stood as if he could not believe the evidence of his senses. Agnes in France—in Paris—in a casino in the *Rue Cadet!* It was impossible. But there she stood before him. Seeing was believing. Was he the sport of some delusion? It was very perplexing. He almost thought that his excited fancy had conjured her up to mock him, she was so quiet, and pale, and motionless. Agnes speedily resolved his doubts. She beckoned to him with her hand.

"I want you," she said. "You can talk to your French friend afterwards."

He followed her passively. The Frenchwoman to whom he had been talking exclaimed, with a shrug of the shoulders—" *Sa femme!*" and forebore to go out after them. She had a wholesome dread of the *gendarmes*, who in France always keep a critical, not to say severe eye upon the "*filles inscrites*." She was too well known as a *lorette*, and a frequenter of *maisons de passe*, to find much favour in the magisterial eye; and although she would not have minded giving Agnes Willoughby a little rough handling for robbing her of her "*garçon gentil*," prudence overruled passion, and she turned

her attention towards other game. When Agnes had led him to the end of the casino, she said, laconically—

“Come with me. I wont have you stopping here talking to a lot of women. Nasty French beasts, I hate them ! Come out.”

Warner, to all intents and purposes, was dumbfounded. His unexpected meeting with Agnes had so surprised him, that he was incapable for the time being of any kind of action. He went along with her like a lamb. Fortunately they did not encounter Lionel Cooper. Agnes's reason for leaving the casino was, that she was afraid of running up against that gentleman, which proceeding might turn out to be an unlucky accident, and mar all her plans. Mr. Dicks discreetly followed a little in the rear. At the entrance Agnes turned round, and made a rapid sign to him, which was equivalent to giving him “the office” that she did want him until the next morning. He stayed behind, and amused himself as most other people did, in conversing with the fair and frail, who, like busy bees, sipped honey from many flowers, and found variety ever charming. Agnes, as soon as she got outside, called a *voiture*, with two mule-like looking horses attached to it ; and pushing Warner in before her, told the man to go to her hotel. When they were alone together, she began to bully ; she knew that it would prove to be the most efficacious way of dealing with a weak-minded man like the one before her.

“So I have found you at last !” she exclaimed.

"Don't you think you are a pretty beast, to run away from me like this?"

"I didn't," he replied, finding his tongue at last.
"They took me."

"Took you?" she said, with an affectation of supreme scorn, indifference, and contempt. "One would think you were a child ten years old."

"I always loved you, Aggy."

"Loved me?"

"Yes, I should think so."

"I must say it looks like it."

"I did, really; and do now just as much as ever."

"I don't want your love, my dear fellow. I would not have it now if you were to give it me," she replied, acting the part she had undertaken to admiration.

"Don't say that, Aggy, dear," said Warner, endeavouring to take her hand. She rudely snatched it away.

"I don't like men who love every woman they come up against. I suppose you love that great French hippopotamus I saw you talking to. You are a nice fellow, I must say."

"I don't care a straw for her," he replied, vehemently.

"No, really. Ah! you wouldn't tell me if you did. I must be a fool to ask you such a question. If you are so fond of me, why did you leave England without marrying me?"

"Because I couldn't help myself. You don't know how they badgered me."

"Lionel Cooper must have some extraordinary influence over you," she exclaimed. "What is it? Have you done anything to put yourself in his power? What is the hold he has over you?"

"He has no hold over me. What nonsense you talk!" he said, indignantly.

"Oh! don't lose your temper. You would not do that if what I say had not something in it. You would like to go back to the casino now and relieve his anxiety, wouldn't you?"

"Oh! no. Not at all," he replied, good-humouredly. "If he misses me, he won't think any harm's come to me. He does not think you are here. He'll imagine that I have found a night's lodging somewhere."

"Don't talk to me like that," cried Agnes, angrily, "or else I'll pitch you out of the cab window."

Warner was silent. The carriage now rattled into the courtyard of the hotel. Warner got out when it stopped, assisted Agnes to alight, and waited to see what he was to do next.

"Give me your arm," said Agnes, in an imperious tone.

He gave it her, and they ascended the stairs together. She led the way to her apartments. When she had ushered him in, she exclaimed—

"Now just sit down. I want to have a little palaver with you."

Going to a sofa, she sat down and began her exercitation.

"You don't imagine for an instant, do you, that I came over to Paris after you?"

Warner confessed his entire ignorance as to the motives by which she had been actuated in undertaking a journey of such magnitude. He could not conscientiously declare that it was a matter of supreme and perfect indifference to him ; and if he could have done so he would not, because he would have been afraid to.

"Oh, you don't know," she said. "I came because I was not going to be sold and bested by you and your father."

"He is not my father."

"Never mind. It is the same thing. He has just as much control over you as if he were. For my part I think he has more power over you than if he were. There must be something between you."

This was said with a view to sapping the foundation of any slight authority or vestige of command that Lionel Cooper might have over Warner ; and the ridicule, sarcastic and unpleasant as it was, had the desired effect.

"I did him, though," she resumed, "when he came to me about you."

"Did you, though ?" asked Warner, evidencing a lively curiosity. "How was it ?"

"He offered me five hundred pounds to give you up. I said I would, and took the money."

At this Warner laughed immoderately, and going up to Agnes, told her she was a brick ; and supplemented his eulogy by asking for something to drink.

"If you want it," she replied, "you can ring for it."

"Where's the bell? They have such rummy-go things here, I never can find them."

When the waiter came he ordered some Hermitage and Rousillon.

"That's the stuff," he said. "Best mixture I ever invented; found it out only this morning with Cooper. And now, I say, be jolly, will you, Aggy? I am sure you have jawed enough. If I were talking to Frenchwomen where's the harm? I didn't know you were looking at me, or you may take your dick I wouldn't have done it."

"I suppose you got drunk the day before you left London on purpose to put off your marriage with me. I have not forgotten what a fool you made me look."

"I could not help it, Aggy," he replied. "The Giant picked me up and made me as screwed as an owl before I knew where I was. You shouldn't have taken me to the kirk. If you had kept me dark till the next morning it would have been all right."

Agnes mentally made a resolve that the biggest and tallest giant in Christendom or Patagonia should not again have the chance of defeating her darling hopes and her pet schemes.

"You had better make me the only reparation you have it in your power to make," she continued.

"What's that, Aggy?"

"Marry me here to-morrow morning."

"All right, I'm game. You see I meant what I said in London, when I told you that I loved you, and that you were the only woman in the whole

world that I cared about making my wife. You are so beautiful, in my opinion. I could take you about for ever and show your lovely hair. These French fellows will go mad over you."

"What about Lionel Cooper?"

"Lionel Cooper may go to blazes," exclaimed Warner.

"Then you are not really afraid of him?"

"How can you talk such nonsense? Why should I be?"

"How should I know? You understand your own affairs best," replied Agnes.

The Hermitage and Rousillon now came up. Warner mixed them together in a large jug, and poured out a glass, which he handed to Agnes. She was pleased to say she liked it. He drank about a pint and a half and looked slightly happier.

"I can't stand being shut up," he said, "without something to sustain me under the trying operation."

"There is safe to be a church here, where we can be married in the Protestant way," said Agnes.

"Safe to be."

"I shall have inquiries made to-morrow morning early. Because if you are to make me your wife there is no reason why you should not do it at once. Put everybody at defiance, and show people that you are your own master. What do you care for the world?"

He went up to the sofa, sat down, and put his arm tenderly round her waist. Then looking up

at her wonderful eyes and hair, he said, while his own eyes were suffused at the depth of feeling he was just then under the influence of—

“As my wife, Aggy, darling, you will be very different from what you have been. The world has made you Agnes Willoughby, I shall make you Agnes Warner; and you will not, I know, ever cause me to repent it—will you, my own pet?”

“Never, dearest,” she replied, kissing him on the forehead.

“You are not angry with me now, Aggy?”

“Not now. It is all over now.”

“Are we greater friends than ever?” he said.

“I hope so,” she murmured. “But you must promise me one thing.”

“A thousand. What is it?”

“Never allow yourself to be led away again by anybody. You are mine now. Although we are not married, I look upon you as my husband; and I have the tenderest regard for your dignity. I think no one but myself ought to have the slightest control over you. And another thing, dearest, don’t drink so much as you have been accustomed to lately.”

“What I have here won’t hurt me,” he said, in a schoolboy sort of fashion, after being told not to eat too many ices, lest he might freeze up the intestinal canal.

Agnes was too experienced—too much a woman of the world—to think anything accomplished until it actually was so. She had experienced too many

bitter disappointments to fall into the error of being sanguine. The cup had slipped from her lips so often, that she was never surprised at such an occurrence, and she could echo the words of the Greek sage,—*πολλὰ μεταξὺ πέλει χυλικος καὶ χειλεος ἀκρον.*

Yet she might have safely congratulated herself upon having limed her bird at last. It was highly impracticable that any one should step between them and snatch him away from her. There was the chance, however, and she determined to guard him jealously, so as to prevent the slightest adverse contingency. She did not allow him to return to the Louvre, but provided a room for him at the Grand Hotel, to which she dismissed him about one o'clock. During that time she had exerted herself to please and fascinate him, and involve him more hopelessly and inextricably than before. She had allowed him to cover her with kisses; she had suffered him to let down her golden hair, and hold it up to the light, and look through the dishevelled tresses like a child with a new plaything. She had permitted him to caress her and call her pet names. It was nothing to her. It amused him, and made him more devoted to her than before. So she gave him full licence to make a toy of her. These endearments, and these liberties, made him long more ardently for the time when he should be able to call her his wife, and show her amongst men as his property, indefeasible and lifelong. After all, it was not a long tenure—

only a lease for life. Agnes, with an amount of patience that did her credit, sat up after Warner had retired, to await Mr. Dicks's arrival.

"I will give him till two," she said ; "if he does not turn up then, I suppose he will not come back till morning."

About the hour she had fixed as the limit of her endurance, he appeared.

"Well!" he exclaimed, "how about the boy?"

"He's all right; I have sent him to bed, and I waited for you to report progress."

Mr. Dicks lighted a fresh cigar, and nodded his head to intimate that he was ready for the communication.

"I gave it him rather hot at first," she said ; "but I cooled down a bit afterwards. And he says he will marry me to-morrow. Is there any place in Paris? There must be some Protestant shop, I should think. What do you say?"

"Must," he replied. "I'll find out to-morrow, the first thing, and go and make all the arrangements. I think, though, I'll keep in the shade until he's turned off, eh?"

"Yes," she said, "I think it will be advisable. Tell the boots to call you early."

"All right; you don't catch this weasel asleep. I must tell you a lark before you go. After you left I went mooning about, and at last I saw Lionel Cooper doing the civil to a pretty little tit—fresh and fair, and plump like a partridge. I kept near them, and I heard them talking together in English. It appeared this woman could jabber a little of the

native language of perfidious Albion. She said she wanted something to drink. He took her to the counter to give her something. Now, I had taken quite a fancy to this girl, and I began to think how I should best old stick-in-the-mud out of her. There was a crowd at the counter, and he was obliged to push through ; while he was gone she strayed on the outskirts ; I went up to her, and as well as I could gave her to understand that she had been talking to a duffer, who was a well-known bilk, and would do her as safe as eggs ; and I dropped a hint that I was an English nilor, much more worthy of her notice—slipped a quid into her hand, and told her that I would wait close by for her. When Lionel Cooper came back, she began to accuse him of all sorts of things—called him a *mouchard*, and abused him in a most choice mixture of English Billingsgate and the virago language of the *Halles*. He did not know what to make of it ; but when she came over to me he glared at me like a tiger. I took off my hat in the most polite manner, and walked away with his woman. Smart, wasn't it ? ”

“ What a fellow you are ! ” exclaimed Agnes, laughing.

Mr. Dicks smoked his cigar placidly, and remarked that he was worth a Jew's-eye to a well-regulated family.

Agnes yawned, and expressed a wish to retire. She could not help feeling that Charley Dicks, with his fertile brain, his prompt action, and his unabashed impudence, was a tower of strength to any

one, and more especially to her at present. With him at her elbow, she did not despair of being Mrs. Horace Warner before many hours had passed over her head, and she wished to bring about this consummation, not so much on account of the social position it would give her, but because she knew it would mortify Milani beyond measure, and inflict the most severe pang upon him that she had it in her power to deliver. Her ambition would be gratified; she would acquire a handsome fortune by the alliance, and yet she would not be really happy. That was not for her. Other and more humble people, dwelling in cottages, may procure happiness and contentment, but it was beyond her reach. In lieu of it, she contrived to make her miserable life as happy as she could, and she wished sometimes that she had solicited Melmoth, the astrologer, to peer a little more closely into futurity, and tell her what fate awaited her in the long years that were yet to come.

CHAPTER XVIL

THE MARRIAGE.

I WILL not be so profane as to say that the marriage between Agnes Willoughby and Horace St. John Warner was made in Heaven. If it was of celestial origin, perhaps it was grievously knocked about in its passage through space, and reached the earth a little out of shape. It was one of those unions which are sure to turn out badly. You can predicate from the outset what the end of them will be. Passionate love on the one side, rather too hot to last; cold indifference on the other side, with a heart so shattered and battered in its conflict with the world, as to be incapable of receiving any new impressions. What little remnant of good in the said heart may have been preserved intact and fresh was pre-engaged, and wore the impress of the accomplished Italian. How, then, could she study her husband and behave to him as it is the bounden duty of a wife? Idle question. It was out of the nature of things terrestrial that she should do so. Nevertheless the marriage took place. Mr. Charles Dicks, with his usual cleverness, arranged all the preliminaries, and the match was made, the fetters arranged gracefully round the wrists of the two contracting parties respectively, and sown the seeds of a lifelong bondage (barring the Divorce Court,

which is a sad annihilator of your adulterous breakers of the Seventh Commandment).

It was with an almost delirious sense of triumph that Agnes returned to the hotel as Mrs. Horace St. John Warner. She had achieved a victory over her two enemies, Lionel Cooper and Milani, and she was especially gratified at the consciousness that she had defeated the perfidious, treacherous and revengeful Italian. She pictured him to herself clenching his hands tightly together on hearing the disastrous news, and cursing the chance which had brought Agnes and Warner together again when he fondly hoped that he had separated them for ever. He would be compelled to confess now that Agnes had made a marriage which placed her above the petty scoffs of narrow-minded people, and which, amongst other things, guaranteed her against want and the innumerable vexations, mortifications and annoyances which move in its train. Agnes did not cease congratulating herself upon the event that had just taken place. Warner himself continued to gaze at her with unmistakable affection. He never even thought whether he should in the time to come repent the bargain he had made. That was a contingency too remote for him to dwell upon. He would have placed it if it had occurred to him in the limbo of wild speculations, amounting to the verge of impossibilities. Tire of Agnes ! Grow wearied of her peerless form and her matchless beauty ! Recoil satiated from those lovely tresses, whose aureous hue would have caused to dull the brightest gold ever minted ! No, no ; he knew

better than that. Rapture was not so easily achieved as to allow of the means by which it was brought about being thrown into the street for some fanciful reason. Agnes was his pole-star. Without her he would be like a mariner on a tempestuous ocean without his chart and destitute of a compass. He was ready and willing to devote his whole life to Agnes. He had that morning sworn allegiance to her. And if ever a man meant what he said when swearing at the altar to love and cherish a woman, Horace Warner did. What did he care for the ugly fact that his wife had, before she attained that dignified position, been rather lavish and profuse in the bestowal of her favours? She was his now—his own; and the ceremony of marriage sanctified her, condoning all her former peccadilloes, and casting a snow-white mantle over the past.

As for Agnes, she did not care a sixpence what Warner thought about her. Not in the least sentimental herself, she could not understand or make allowance for its existence in others. It was a weakness she was always inclined to ridicule and make fun of. All she cared about was becoming Warner's wife ; and that not because she loved him, but it answered her own selfish ends, and gratified her pride, and, as the vulgarism has it, "made an honest woman of her." She considered that she flattered Warner by accepting him. She was perfectly well aware of her manifold attractions, and she thought that if he gave her money, position, and a name, she gave him acknowledged beauty and a compensating amount of charms—in her opinion it

was six of one and half-a-dozen of the other ; or, if there was any preponderance, it was on her side of the balance.

At the wedding breakfast—which was conspicuous for the absence of the bridesmaids, the weeping mother, and the affected, speech-making *Fatherfamilias*, with his hand on his stomach, intended to represent the region of his heart, and express to everybody how deeply touched he was at the loss of his inexpressibly dear daughter—a quantity of champagne was disposed of. The trio—consisting of the bride and bridegroom and Mr. Charles Dicks in all the glory of a white waistcoat and a frock-coat buttoned neatly over it, after the manner of the swells in the Burlington—grew hilarious, and Mr. Dicks, in a moment of impetuosity, stood upon his legs and looked like talking.

“ H’m,” he said, by way of a preliminary remark, and with a view of clearing away an imaginary huskiness in his throat. “ I rise,” he said, with a gravity becoming the occasion, “ I rise to propose a health, ladies and gentlemen—that is, I beg pardon for speaking in the plural when the singular’s the correct thing. Propose a health, I think I said. Yes, a health, which I’m sure you’ll drink with all the honour which it so deservedly merits.”

Here Mr. Warner broke a champagne glass in his frantic attempts at applause, which catastrophe elicited a soft reproof from his loving spouse.

“ Happening to be staying in this hotel, I had the pleasure, as you are all aware, of running up against my friend, Mr. Warner, this morning, on the happy occasion of his nuptials—that’s the word

I think—nuptials. He asked me to give the bride away and come to the breakfast. 'Twas too much honour for so humble an individual as Charley Dicks ; but he did it to oblige an old friend——”

“ Draw your wind, sir.” Remark from Mr. Warner, supplemented by—“ Another glass of wine, old boy.”

“ It's one of the proudest moments of my life, I have no hesitation in saying so. I have sat at the same table with emperors and kings, to say nothing of German princes.”

“ Oh ! oh !” Exclamations proceeding from Mr. Warner, promptly checked by madame.

“ Yes, in the company of kings and the society of queens. I've—I've——”

A pause.

“ Pump it up. Try back.” Mr. Warner again.

Demonstration suppressed. Mr. Warner passive under the conjugal yoke, as if he liked it.

“ But I've never experienced greater gratification than I do at this moment. It's worth five thousand pounds to me. (This was strictly true, and more deserving of credence as being matter of fact than the allusion to the society of kings and queens.) I'm proud to see my friend Warner married ; but I hope not done for. No ; let us hope that he will lead the convivial band and propose the hearty toast——”

“ Under a woodcock ; that's your sort, sir.” Ejaculation from Mr. Warner, followed by angry chiding on the part of his better-half. Subsides into his boots, that is, as far as he conveniently can.

“ I said toast,” resumed Mr. Dicks. “ Where was

I? Don't like to be put out. Said toast. Oh!—hearty toast, and grace the festive board and the elegant banquet with his sumptuous presenee. No; that's not it. Sumptuous banquet—elegant presence; that's more like it. In eonclusion I beg to propose the health of the blushing bride—(N.B. This was a palpable misnomer, as the B.B. was rather pale than otherwise)—than whom a worthier or a better lady never graced the aneestral halls of duke or marquis. A lady to be proud of, sir, and one whom one's posterity may boast of in that far-off time when London shall be a heap of ruins, and Paris a jungle for the beast of the field and the bird of the air——”

Mr. Warner was heard to say “Cuekoo.” Being threatened with immediate expulsion, he discreetly held his peace.

Could it be possible that Mr. Charles Dicks was indulging in satire in making the foregoing observations?

“Like the pet of the merry monarch, the sweet and vivacious Nell Gwynne.”

This was an unhappy allusion. It is always dangerous to sail too close to the wind.

“She deserves to have her portrait painted by—by—some swell, and stuek up in a gallery for future generations to gaze at.”

It will be observed that the speaker's well of pure English was running dry.

“I propose her health, and that of my worthy friend, Mr. Warner; and I say, let's go to the *Mabille* to-night.”

As Mr. Dicks sat down, Mr. and Mrs. Warner laughed immoderately, and Mr. Dicks joined them, laying himself open to the charge of incipient imbecility by so doing.

In the midst of this merriment, and while Warner was holding out his glass for Mr. Dicks to replenish, the door suddenly opened, and in walked no less a personage than Lionel Cooper.

At first his apparition was like that of a hawk in a dove-cot. But the alarm was only momentary. They looked upon him as a dried snake, and instantly recovered their serenity. Warner felt his heart beat a little faster, but what he had done could not be undone. He had taken the irrevocable step, and he must now abide by the consequences.

Lionel Cooper walked straight up to Warner in an ungovernable rage, and seized him by the coat-collar. With one bound Mr. Dicks was by his side. Lionel Cooper found himself in his turn grasped from behind, and forcibly pushed down into a chair. Mr. Dicks was standing over him with his fists clenched, and looking "ugly."

"Now, guv'nor," cried Mr. Dicks; "what's your little game?"

He did not approve of the harmony of the meeting being disturbed by any one, much less Mr. Lionel Cooper.

"I want my step-son. I do not choose that he shall be seen in such disreputable society," replied Mr. Cooper.

Warner was about to take up the gage of battle and admit everything, but Agnes warned him by

a significant gesture not to speak. She knew how to do what the special pleaders call confession and avoidance, and she could "traverse" with cool effrontery if it became necessary.

"I am not without friends, Mr. Cooper," she exclaimed, "and if you address those remarks to me, there is some one in this room who will resent it. I am not without protectors."

"I do not wish to have anything to say to you," replied Lionel Cooper. "I have been tricked, deceived, and defrauded by you."

"Indeed!" she said. "If you don't wish to talk to me, my dear fellow, it suits me to talk to you. As to your five hundred pounds, I beg to assure you that it has been exceedingly useful to me. It has enabled me to come over to Paris and to renew my acquaintance with your amiable relation, who is not very objectionable in himself, but I should prefer him better if he had not such odious connexions. There is one consolation as regards yourself—you are not his father; you have only crept into the family by the surreptitious means of marriage."

"Horace!" exclaimed Mr. Cooper, "come away from this woman. I will not stay here to be insulted."

Horace grinned, but did not attempt to move.

"Come, sir. I have those outside who will compel you if you refuse."

"Not a bit of it," said Agnes. "Don't be in such a devil of a hurry. Warner is his own master; you have no control over him. I suppose you have found me out by the assistance of the

police, and now you want to frighten Horace by threatening him with a forcible removal. Such a thing is absurd. I could have you removed for coming into my room and making a blackguard of yourself."

"Has this woman any control over you," asked Mr. Cooper, "or are you free to act for yourself?"

"This woman, as you call her," replied Agnes, drawing herself up, "has every control over him."

"How? What do you mean?" cried Mr. Cooper, frightened in spite of himself.

"Ask him, he will tell you."

"What is it, Horace? What is the meaning of this random talk?"

Warner turned very pale, tossed off a glass of wine, and replied slowly but distinctly—

"I made Agnes Willoughby my wife this morning."

"Your wife!" exclaimed Lionel Cooper, leaping to his feet. "Oh, my God! can it be true?"

Agnes drew the certificate from her pocket, and flourished it in the air before his eyes.

"It looks like it," she replied, drily, to his general question.

"Beaten after all," murmured Lionel Cooper, in an almost heart-broken tone.

"Yes, old fellow," said Agnes, who caught the remark. "You are beaten, and it serves you d—— well right. He is my husband. That licks you, doesn't it?"

"Don't chaff him any more," whispered Warner.

"You mind your own business," she cried.

"I only spoke," he muttered, sitting down on a chair, and asking Dicks for a cigar.

"Now, Mr. Lionel Cooper, have you anything else to say to me?"

"Yes," he replied, collecting himself by a violent effort. "If I could hurl an anathema at you——"

"Why don't you say put a curse on me at once?" interrupted Agnes. "I can't understand your long words. You had better bring a dictionary with you the next time you call."

"You are a bad woman," he persisted.

"Oh! yes, I know that. Anything else?"

"You have ruined this poor boy. But Heaven will reward you for it."

"Handsomely I hope," she said, with a provoking smile.

"He must be demented, or he would never have put himself in such a position," said Lionel Cooper, reflectively.

"In that case it is only kind and charitable in me to look after him."

"*You!*" he exclaimed, with every indication of intense loathing, disgust, and pious horror. "The clergyman who married you might just as well have tied a corpse to a living body."

"I say, Charley," said Agnes to Mr. Dicks, "just put him out, will you? he's getting tiresome."

"Right you are," replied Mr. Dicks, who went up to Lionel Cooper, and catching hold of his coat, said—"Come along, master, you're bound to go."

And by exercising his strength, in spite of Mr.

Lionel Cooper's struggles, he succeeded in trotting him along the room, and opening the door, propelled him by a kick into the arms of three *gendarmes*. Mr. Dicks stood astonished at his own temerity, and having put himself in the power of the law, by committing an assault, he expected every moment that one of the cocked-hatted gentlemen would draw his sabre and rush upon him ; but Lionel Cooper appeared too much prostrated by the events of the morning to wish to prosecute Mr. Dicks. In fact, it is not a nice thing after you have been kicked to pull up your kicker at a police-court. You publish the story of your chastisement, and the sympathy of the public always goes with the kicker and not the kicked. So Lionel Cooper spoke a word or two in French to the men of the law, and they all descended the grand staircase together. Mr. Dicks chuckled, and muttering to himself "A shave, by jingo !" shut the door and rejoined the bride and bridegroom.

"The old boy cuts up rusty," observed Warner.

"I gave him as good as he brought, though," replied Agnes.

"Yes, you shut him up," remarked Mr. Dicks.

"I stood him as long as I could," said Agnes. "But when he began to get coarse and offensive I had him turned out, because under the circumstances I didn't want to break his head with a champagne bottle."

"Do you know what he'll do?" exclaimed Warner.

"No. What?"

"Why, he'll try to get me shut up in a lunatic

asylum. He said so. He swore he would when we were at Fenton's."

"But he can't," replied Agnes.

"He'll try, any how; you see if he does not. You two must look after me. If I were out of the way the old sweep would get you, too."

"Hang me if I didn't think so," replied Mr. Dicks. "Well, don't you get in a funk. We'll keep an eye on you. He'll have bad luck if he tries any of his games on with this happy family."

Warner smiled in rather a sickly manner. It was clear that he was somewhat afraid of his step-father, and Mr. Dicks's declaration did not altogether suffice to reassure him. Agnes was gloomy for a short time after Lionel Cooper's departure. Warner was moody, and Mr. Dicks's gaiety appeared a little forced. The wine, however, circulated freely.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ASSASSIN.

AFTER spending the honeymoon in Paris, Agnes and her husband returned to England. Mr. Dicks had preceded them, as his business affairs required his immediate presence. Charley Dicks was a necessity in London to a certain class of people. There were bills to be discounted, and houses to be bought, and money to be won at the gambling-table, and who should do it except Mr. Dicks? Gallant officers and noble lords will run short of cash occasionally, and Mr. Dicks stood *in loco parentis* to many a young fellow as far as the supplies went, but then he knew he was all right. His interest, if it was not cent. per cent., was not far off it, and if Cornet Trefusis of the — Hussars did owe him a few "centuries," his uncle, Lord Hardiam, was sure to "stump up" when the writ was issued, and "Victoria by the grace of God" began to move in the matter. Then there were some men who, lamenting over the departed glories of Crockford's, thought Mr. Dicks's miniature Hell better than nothing, and having a little money to spare they derived a sort of melancholy pleasure from losing it. It was only another way of spending it. The excitement of gaming was worth the penalty they paid for it.

They had after their losses quite enough to keep their horses, their carriages, their shooting-boxes, and their powdered footmen ; and—O mores !—their women. Mr. Dicks profited by their love of high play, and so he returned home to look after his affairs, which were in a state that could not brook neglect. Warner had already discovered that married life is not a bed of roses, especially when you have an imperious woman to deal with, who has seen more life in five years than you are likely to see in twenty. The matrimonial couch was thickly studded with thorns, and they had a disagreeable way of running into him with their sharp prickly points every now and then. He winced a good deal while undergoing the operation, but he had not as yet ventured to kick over the traces. He found out that if he had ever hoped to be master in his own house he had been cherishing a fallacy, for he could not receive or write a letter which his wife did not insist upon seeing. She detected him one day in writing a letter to Lionel Cooper, and she took advantage of the opportunity which, it must be confessed, was not a bad one, to give him a bit of her mind upon the subject. She asked him, in the first place, how he dared to write to anybody without previously consulting her. Lionel Cooper was the last man he ought to think of noticing ; he was her enemy and that was quite enough. He had behaved very badly to both of them. Warner must be a mean-spirited hound to go and kiss his hand in this way. Let her catch him at it again, and see what he'd get. She'd let

Cooper and the whole lot of them know that they had their master in her.

Warner passively submitted. One glance at her golden hair quieted the rising passion which prompted him to assert his independence. He promised with meek submission that he would not offend again in a similar manner, and asked for a kiss as the price of his surrender, which the haughty beauty peremptorily refused to give him. Most men object to women wearing what are, in the language of tailors, called the breeches. If they attempt it, the disapproving husbands let them know that they are not lined with chamois leather, so that they quickly subside into the subordinate position that ought always to be filled by a wife. It is the husband's duty to love and cherish—the wife's to obey; and if she does not do it, the husband has only himself to thank for it. Warner had not been married long enough to Agnes to grow tired of her society, and he did not feel the least desire on his return to town to go out to his old haunts and to look up the Birmingham Giant. He took a house and furnished it, and started a handsome mail phaeton. But Agnes had her own ideas of propriety now that she was Mrs. Warner, and she insisted upon having an open carriage with a pair of bays, a footman and a coachman on the box dressed in the Warner livery, which was a very becoming one to the wearers thereof. She considered that a mail phaeton was all very well for ladies of easy virtue, but as she was strictly, not to say severely proper, she preferred the dowager sort of

conveyance we have alluded to. But what is born in the bone will come out in the flesh. Agnes one day at lunch expressed a desire to go to Cremorne.

"It is Simpson's benefit to-night," she said, "and I must go. Everybody will be there."

"Go to Cremorne, Aggy?" exclaimed Warner; "what an idea! Come to the opera, if you like."

"I shall go where I choose, without asking your permission," replied Agnes.

"Not to Cremorne, I hope," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because it is not the proper place for you now you are Mrs. Warner."

Agnes laughed.

"That's a fine thing to boast of certainly," she replied. "Mrs. Warner!—my God!—I ought to be a tearing swell, I suppose, since I'm Mrs. Warner?"

"Anyhow," he said, "being Mrs. Warner is better than being Agnes Willoughby."

"I don't know that," said Agnes, provokingly. "I was very well satisfied as I was. I don't feel very much honoured by the alliance with a mad fool like you."

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, can you deny it? Don't your own friends threaten to shut you up in a madhouse?"

"I know they do," replied Warner, looking much hurt; "but that doesn't prove that I am not all there."

"Oh, doesn't it? It does something towards it then."

"If you are going to talk to me like this I shall go and look up the Giant."

"Yes, you'd better," replied Agnes, "I want you all day."

"I shall not stop if I don't choose," he replied, firmly.

"Then you'll have to choose," she said, with equal decision.

"This is all I get for marrying you," he said, bitterly; "upon my soul to God, I must have been a beastly fool."

"What did you do it for then?" she asked, with a smile.

"That's just what I want to know."

"At all events, old fellow, you have done it and you can't get out of that," exclaimed Agnes, triumphantly.

"Worse luck," muttered Warner, feeling very much cut up and mortified.

"I shall go to Cremorne to-night," persisted Agnes, "and you will come with me. You don't suppose I am going alone. They would say that you had cut me or something."

"They may say it then, for I shant go," answered Warner. "I will take you to any reasonable place, but I want to forget what you have been, and I don't want to go anywhere amongst associations which will remind me of it."

"I don't want to forget it. I like it. I know I have been pretty considerably loose, and I am proud of it."

"Are you? Then I am sorry for you."

"Oh ! my dear fellow, you may bully, I am not afraid of you ; it would take a good deal better man than you to frighten me," replied Agnes, with her usual composure.

"I suppose you and your friend Charley Dicks have some game in hand, and that is why you want to go to Cremorne," observed Warner, becoming unusually bold for him.

"Suppose we have. What's that to you ?"

"Only this ; you won't make a tool of me."

"I certainly shall if I want to. But you are such a fool that I am afraid nobody could make much use of you."

"I have known Mr. Charles Dicks before to-day," said Warner, "and somebody else too."

"Who's that ? I wasn't aware that your acquaintance was so extensive."

"A fellow called Milani—a singing man."

"Oh ! so you have got hold of that chaff, have you ?" replied Agnes, without losing her temper.

"Yes I have, and I don't think any the better of you for it."

"In—deed !" replied Agnes ; "and who was so good as to tell you ?"

"You won't take any further notice of it if I mention his name ?"

"No," she said.

"It was Teddy," exclaimed Warner.

"Was it ? I'll give it him when I come across him," replied Agnes ; "I have had it in for him for some time past," she added, angrily.

"I say, don't," exclaimed Warner; "you swore you wouldn't say anything."

"Oh, but I shall!"

"I wish you wouldn't. You always try to make me look small."

"That *would* be difficult," replied Agnes. "Now what have you to say about Milani and me? we had better have it out at once."

"I don't say anything. People used to talk about you; but now you are my wife that ought to be forgotten."

"Ought to be! then why did you rake it up?"

"Because I met him yesterday, and he gave me an order for a box, and I could not help thinking of what I had heard."

"Just what I might expect from such a man as you," replied Agnes; "any one can play upon you. You are like an old woman, you will stand and listen if there is only a monkey chattering. How would you like to have a real grievance, eh?"

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. How would you like to have something to growl over? Milani's in London, and I can soon renew my acquaintance with him."

"For God's sake, Agnes, don't talk like that! I shall think you are going mad!" he replied.

"People who are mad themselves always think others in the same state. It is your fault; you began it. You jawed about Milani, and set my back up, and you should not have done it."

Warner got up and walked up and down the room in an uncomfortable manner.

"Sit down, will you?" cried Agnes, testily; "you'll make me sick if you go on like that. What a fidgety man you are!"

"Enough to make me, I think," he replied.

"You can have a row, if you want it," said Agnes.

"I don't want a row; but if we cannot live together without this sort of thing, the sooner we strike a balance and cut the connexion, the better I shall like it."

He spoke passionately, but meaning what he said.

"You can do that; it won't break my heart. But as to cutting the connexion altogether, it's out of your power. I am your wife; don't you see that?"

"You are always shying that in my face. I know you are, and if I hadn't been a thundering fool, I should not have made you so!" answered Warner.

"The pity is on my side," said Agnes.

"If it is, I can't see it."

"You never can see anything. You are mentally blind as a bat, I think," she replied. "But I can't waste my time in talking to you; I have something else to do."

"You may do what you like!" he retorted, savagely; "I shall go to the opera to-night; you may come with me, if you like; if not, stay at home."

"I shall go to Cremorne, as I told you I should."

"Very well, do it, and then you will see what will happen."

"Oh, yes ! You fancy you are very brave," said Agnes, sweeping out of the room, without staying to say another word.

"Well, I'm d——d !" ejaculated Warner, when she had departed ; "this is a nice state of things—it has come to something, certainly. I suppose she will go to Cremorne to-night. It is no good my talking to her ; she cares as much for what I say as the wind does. I shall not accompany her ; she may go by herself. She told me one day that I ought to get her into society, but I can't do it ; people won't have her, and she says I can't expect her to stop at home — be moped to death. If she goes to a place like Cremorne, she is sure to meet a lot of fellows. Jolly for me if she goes blinking and smiling at them ; I ought to have kept her ; I have only put myself in her power by marrying her."

He saw nothing more of Agnes that day. She went out without letting him know where she was going, so he went down to his club, a little place close to where the Parthenon used to be. They would not have him at Arthur's, or Egerton's, or Pratt's, so he was glad to get in where he could. In the evening he dressed himself and went to the opera. Before he left home he wrote down the number of the box on a piece of paper and left it with the servant for Agnes, in case she might change her mind, and elect to follow him, although he secretly despaired of her doing anything of the sort.

"I don't suppose she will go to Cremorne much before eleven," he said. "If she does, there will be nobody there for her to speak to, and I will jump into a hansom and go down there after her as soon as the opera is over."

Milani, as usual, threw the house into ecstasies, and received his accustomed ovation. Ladies threw him bouquets with precious stones in them, and he used to boast that in one season he had received nearly forty thousand pounds' worth of jewellery in this way. So much for the power of song! The modern Orpheus makes a good thing of his occupation. Warner's box was at the extreme end of a long corridor, near the stalls, so that he had a very good view of the house. He sat some time after the curtain fell, looking through his glasses at the bevy of *belles* who were assembled. He saw some ladies with whom he was acquainted, but he did not like to go and speak to them, in case his Katharine should be somewhere in the house, when she would indubitably let him know that she had been a witness to his politeness; so he contented himself with gazing at a safe distance. During the progress of the opera he had remarked Milani's eye fixed upon him more than once, and he thought how gratified the Italian must be by the unqualified success he had achieved in this country, and the high pinnacle he had placed himself and his fame upon. He did not know that all this pleasure had passed away, and that the great master of his art was only intent upon making money with which to return to the sunny land of his birth. Applause

did not move him ; it palled upon his senses long ago. While Warner was speculating upon divers matters, including Milani, and the chance of "Leading Article" for the Two Thousand, he was surprised to hear a sound as of a door opening in the wall of his box, which was in the second tier and the last in the row ; he turned round promptly, and was still more astonished to behold the veiled figure of a woman standing on the threshold of a secret door, which had been opened from the inside. She held a lamp in her hand, and directly she found that she had arrested Warner's attention, she made signs, and beckoned him to come to her. At first he was paralysed with amazement at so unusual a spectacle —the audience were talking and laughing ; the orchestra was a congeries of discordant sounds, which always precede the commencement of the interlude. Could it be possible that a woman emerging from some secret corridor had come to summon him to her side for some mysterious purpose ? Was it the refraction of some form in a mirror—a mirage—a phantasmagoria ? He got up and approached in order to resolve his doubts. No ; the woman retreated backwards, holding the light before her, and motioned him to follow her. She was dressed in sombre attire. She wore a black moirée dress surmounted with a lace shawl, a velvet hat, with a thick, impenetrable veil descending from it.

"If I could only see her face," thought Warner. He felt ashamed of being afraid of a woman : discarding his pusillanimity, he moved after her. As he crossed the threshold of the door a cold chill

struck to the very marrow of his bones. It might have been the sudden presentiment of evil, which takes the shape of an irrepressible shudder, which country people attribute to somebody passing over the spot which is eventually to be your grave—or more likely it was owing to the damp air of the little-used passage into which he was entering. He had not penetrated far before the door closed behind him. Whether this was occasioned by a rush of wind, or by a string, over which his conductress had some command, he could not tell. He was now compelled to undertake the adventure ; his retreat was cut off, and trembling slightly, which was excusable under the circumstances, he pursued the path which lay before him, treading in the footsteps of his mysterious leader. A thousand conjectures floated through his mind. At first he thought it might be some ballet dancer, or some actress, who had taken a fancy to him—he had heard of such things—and who had chosen this singular mode of obtaining an interview with him. Of one thing he was certain : this strange guide must be in some way connected with the theatre, or she would never have known the door in the back of the box by which she had entered. He walked for some distance along a cobwebby, narrow, winding corridor, and at last came to some steps, which he ascended after his guide. They were nearing the upper portion of the theatre ; the steps were about thirty in number, and conducted them into a small room totally unfurnished. The unknown set the light down upon the floor, and stood in the entrance to

the staircase. This was a suspicious attitude for her to assume, because it looked as if she did so with the intention of cutting off his retreat. Warner now thought it was time to take the initiative ; the strange woman would not speak to him, so he had better address himself to her.

"I think I have followed you very obediently," he said ; "perhaps you will be good enough to tell me who you are, and what you want with me?"

The only reply the veiled figure made was a movement of the right hand, which it advanced to its head ; immediately afterwards snatching the veil away and throwing it upon the ground. The lamp on the ground shed a faint light upon the scene, and Warner looked up, expecting to see the face of some lovely woman revealed, but, to his dismay, the spectacle which awaited him was one of a very different nature. The unknown wore a hideous black mask, such as executioners were accustomed to conceal their features in when men were beheaded upon the block. Warner recoiled until he touched the wall. The unknown laughed discordantly, and the words, *mia figlia*, rang out in a rich treble ; they were of terrible import in the opera of "Rigoletto," just over. They are spoken by the fool when he finds out that his daughter has been murdered instead of the duke. The unknown evidently wished to inspire terror in Warner's breast by recalling the most horrible scene in the opera. The echoes had hardly died away before Warner grew impatient : he saw that he was being trifled with ; he dreaded that he had fallen

into the hands of some mad woman, and that had betrayed himself into the power of some one who wished to rob, and perhaps to murder him. He determined to put an end to the suspense which was causing the beads of perspiration to start to his forehead. Rushing forward with the intention of unmasking the unknown, he unfortunately omitted to notice the lamp, against which his foot tripped ; it rolled over, the oil exuded, smothering the wick, and soon the darkness of the grave enveloped everything. Warner did not pause more than a moment in his impetuous career ; he heard the unknown utter an exclamation which should not have proceeded from feminine lips ; but this did not strike him at the moment so much as it did afterwards. The next moment he was upon the personage, whoever or whatever it was, which had decoyed him into the dark and musty apartment in which he then was. Before the unknown could divine or frustrate his intention, Warner had dragged the mask from his face, and his hand came in contact with what he knew well to be a man's moustache. A feeling of deadly terror took possession of Warner ; he was unquestionably in the power of some enemy who could be animated but by one object, and that was, to deprive him of his life. Up to this time he had firmly believed that a woman was before him, but by his decision and promptitude he had discovered the contrary. He was roused from his feeling of despair by a sensation of pain in his shoulder—a poignard had grazed his skin. Fortunately, owing to the dark-

ness, the weapon had not taken effect in the place for which its lethal point was destined ; had it done so, Warner's earthly career would have been at an end. Seeing that a struggle for his existence had now commenced, he dealt several blows at random with his fists, one of which took effect upon his mysterious assailant, and sent him tottering through the darkness. Taking advantage of this successful hit, Warner groped his way to the head of the staircase, and descended rapidly. He could hear the footsteps of the unknown following him. Warner was obliged to go carefully, as the stairs were steep and rickety. At length, to his inexpressible satisfaction, he reached the landing at the end of the flight ; as he did so an idea struck him. He reascended two steps, and laid his body down upon one of them, so as to prove a stumbling-block to any one who passed over him. He knew that the unknown would not pause in his headlong career to feel every step he took, and he calculated that he would tumble over his prostrate body, and fall heavily on the ground. If he had wished to break the neck of his treacherous assassin, he would have gone up higher, but this he did not wish to do —he only wished to stun him, if he could accomplish it, in order that he might identify him. It is not agreeable to know that you are environed by stabbers in the dark upon whom you cannot possibly take vengeance, because you do not know who they are. It happened precisely as Warner had prognosticated : the unknown missed his footing at this unexpected impediment, and fell heavily for-

ward upon his forehead. Warner was upon him in a moment. A new difficulty now arose. It was as dark as pitch ; Warner did not in the least know in what part of the theatre he was, or where to go to ask for a light. Trying a venture, he bawled out at the top of his voice,—“ Lights, here ! Lights, here !”

But no one answered his noisy summons. A rat or a mouse scampered away from its hiding-place with precipitate confusion, but that was all. Warner, luckily at this juncture, bethought himself of some vesuvians he had in his cigar-case which was in his pocket. It did not take him long to extract one and to light it ; he held it close to the face of the unknown—so close as almost to scorch the hair on it. A glance sufficed ! He fell back literally astounded—the man who had decoyed him into the dark and dreary corridor, and who had endeavoured to stab him to the heart in the empty room in an obscure part of the theatre, was MILANI ! It was enough to make his head reel ! “ What could be the man’s motive,” thought Warner, “ for the committal of so iniquitous an action ? In what way have I offended him ? What have I done to incur his anger and resentment ? ” He had not much time to indulge in these speculations, for Milani groaned. Warner, supposing this to be the prelude to his return to consciousness, considered that the most prudent thing he could do would be to remove himself from the dangerous vicinity of the Italian. Striking another vesuvian, he perceived by its flare the entrance to the passage

he had traversed when following Milani in the first instance. He pursued this until he came to the door in the wall ; another fuzee showed him the spring in the wall, which, when pressed, gave ingress to the box ; he essayed it, entered, and sat down on a chair, quivering all over with nervousness, arising from the exciting and wonderful adventure he had just successfully passed through. He was covered with dust from head to foot, so he threw his overcoat on his shoulders, and, unable to derive any gratification from the ballet, he left the theatre, and went home. His mind was a chaos of unpleasant ideas, one of which took a prominent place amongst the rest ; he tried to drive it away over and over again, but it would persist in obtruding itself, in spite of all his endeavours to exclude it. It was a hideous, mis-shapen idea, and one very repugnant to all his feelings. It took this form :— “Perhaps my wife has grown tired of me. She may have resuscitated her fancy for Milani ; and she has told him that if he can succeed in removing me she will be his. I have made a settlement upon her, so what does she care for me ? I am, doubtless, in her way.”

“Oh, my God !” he muttered ~~and~~. “If my wife should have hired Milani to assassinate me !”

He covered his face with his hands, and gave way to deep emotion.

CHAPTER XIX.

ON HER KNEES.

WARNER was in no humour to retire to rest : his thoughts were in a whirl. Sleep was out of the question. So he sat up in the drawing-room until Agnes should return. She had rigidly adhered to her determination to go to Cremorne. All the king's horses and all the king's men could not have prevented her. She would not have been turned aside by the Great Mogul himself, had that mighty Potentate so far intruded himself upon her and her doings as to telegraph his veto to her. The hours that elapsed before she came back were not passed in a pleasant or happy manner by her husband. He smoked and drank in order to dissipate the fuliginous vapours which crowded upon his brain. One terrible, soul-deadening suspicion haunted his imagination, and deadened his faculties. That was, that Agnes Willoughby, *his wife*, was in some way ieaged with the man who had attempted, in the most cold-blooded manner, to murder him. Every now and then the scene he had just gone through recurred to his mental vision, and he shudderingly put up his hand to ward it off. The veiled figure —the corridor, long unused, dusty, and cobweb-ridden : the steep staircase, the empty room, the black mask, and, culminating horror!—the fight in

the dark when he had to battle with an unknown assassin for his life. The bare fact of the attempted assassination would not have moved him so much. It was the soul-crushing reflection that Milani was the man who had attacked him in the stealthy, snake-like manner, which would have done credit to an Indian scout. Report said that Agnes had loved Milani before her marriage ; that she had followed him up and down like a spaniel ; that she had showered her caresses upon him and overwhelmed him with every demonstration of affection. Warner had never, that he was aware of, in any way offended the Italian. If he had inadvertently given him cause for complaint, he could have understood the man's vindictiveness. But no. He racked his memory for the slightest cause, and he found none—not a vestige, not an iota. Supposing that Milani still loved Agnes, or that his dormant love had been aroused by the fact of her marriage with another, the reason of his attempt upon Warner's life was apparent. Warner's dread was that Agnes, thinking she had feathered her nest as well as she could, had plotted his destruction with Milani ; and adoring her as he did, he could not entertain such a suspicion without enduring the most horrible torture.

She was the dream of his life—the hope of his existence ; and to be so cruelly disappointed in her was more than he could bear. At half-past three Agnes came home. She had evidently been drinking : her cheeks were flushed, and her manner defiant. Warner was frightfully pale. Every minute a shiver passed through his frame. Without

taking any notice of him she sat down upon the sofa, and looked round her in a vacant manner.

" You have come at last," he remarked, in a strange sort of way, utterly devoid of animation.

" I didn't hurry myself," she replied.

" I can see that," he said ; " and it is quite a chance that you meet me here."

" Is it ? I suppose you have been amusing yourself. Pity you did not stay with your friends all night."

" I have had very little amusement, Agnes," said Warner, seriously.

" That is your fault. If you had come with me, you might have been jolly enough."

" I wish I had," he replied. " I should not then have been so miserable as I am now. I hope I shall never live to go through such another night as this one."

" Why ?" she asked, her curiosity excited, she hardly knew wherefore.

" Upon my word, Agnes," said Warner, while there was something petrifying in his manner, " I do not know how to tell you. But something has happened which you ought to and must be made acquainted with. It is so dreadful, though, that I cannot summon up courage to begin."

" Are you joking ?" exclaimed Agnes. " Are you trying to rile me ?"

" I declare before God, that I am only too much in earnest, Agnes," he replied. " I wish I was not."

There was something so convincing about his

manner that she became partially sobred on the instant, and, sitting up, she looked at him with expectancy.

"Do not interrupt me until I have finished my recital," he said.

On receiving her promise, he proceeded—

"I went to the opera to-night, as I told you I should. Milani, of course, played and sang to perfection. After the opera was over, I sat in my box looking at the house, when I was startled by seeing a secret door in the wall of the box open. A veiled figure—that of a woman apparently—stood on the threshold, with a lamp in her hand. She beckoned to me, and, I knew not why, I followed her through a lengthy corridor, up a flight of stairs into a dark, empty room. She tore off her veil, and stood revealed in a black mask. The figure endeavoured to detain me in that room. We fought. My life was attempted. In the struggle, by feeling a moustache I satisfied myself that I was attacked by a man. I conquered him. Striking a light, I identified him. He was——"

Here Warner broke off abruptly, in order to scrutinize his wife's face closely, so that he might detect any evidence of guilt, any tremor or irrepressible nervousness, such as a woman capable of planning the murder of her husband would be likely to exhibit. She had listened open-mouthed to his tale, now perfectly sober, staid as a judge. She might, from her demeanour, have been drinking in some extraordinary Otranto or Udolpho romance; but no sign of conscious crime appeared

upon her face. Her eyes did not fall; nor did she evince the least trepidation.

"Who?" she exclaimed, anxiously, as he stopped. Warner gazed at her with a stern aspect, and replied—

"Milani."

"Good God!" cried Agnes.

"Yes, Agnes," he continued. "The Italian, with whose name people couple yours, was the man who tried to kill me to-night in that lonely room in the deserted part of the Opera House."

"Are you positive?"

"I have not the scintillation of a doubt. I would stake everything I have in the world upon it."

"Why do you look at me like that?" demanded Agnes, noticing for the first time his pallor, and his glaring, bloodshot eyes.

"Because I don't know what to think. I would rather die than harbour any evil suspicion of you. Yet—"

"Of me?" repeated Agnes. "What *do* you mean? You cannot suspect me of any complicity with Milani. Is that it?"

Warner shook his head, sadly.

"I have said nothing," he replied. "You have no reason to wish me to live any longer. Men say you love Milani. The conclusion is easy."

Agnes started to her feet, and stood before him.

"You cannot surely mean that?" she said. "Say you have only been trifling with my feelings."

"If I say so, I shall not speak the truth."

It was now her turn to become pale and statuesque.

"Horace," she exclaimed, putting her hands together in a suppliant manner, "Horace, you must retract those words. I cannot live if you do not."

"What proof have I of your innocence?" he asked.

"What proof?" she exclaimed. "Every proof. Look at me; is my manner that of a guilty woman? Do I seem like a murderer? No, Horace, I swear to you, upon my knees, that I am as innocent as a baby of the slightest design against your life."

As she spoke, she fell on her knees at his feet, and throwing back her head, held up her hands in a mute appeal for his credence and his former confidence.

He folded his arms, and looked down coldly upon her.

"If you wish me out of the way, Agnes," he said, "kill me yourself; don't hire an Italian bravo to do so. I will not mind dying by your hand. Only tell me that you are tired of me, and I will suffer death to-morrow; but for the love of Christ, do not have me assassinated in the dark by men who are subsequently to take my place in your heart and your affections."

The poor fellow showed plainly enough by his demeanour that without Agnes he did not consider life worth having. She could not help being touched by his evident devotion. Still on her knees, she grasped one of his hands and pressed it rapturously to her lips.

"Horace," she murmured amidst her tears which fell quickly, "I love you. You have taught me to do so to-night. I may have married you in a moment of selfishness and chagrin; but since I have been your wife no one can breathe a syllable against me. I have been yours, and yours alone. I know my temper is bad; but I have been spoiled and petted by men, who have allowed me to have my own way in everything. I will try to be good for your sake. But it is hard to alter the habits of one's whole life. I give you my most sacred word, dearest Horace, that I am in no way, however remote, mixed up in this attempt of Milani's, which is not only cowardly, but horrible. I can only suppose his motive to be revenge for my having married you. Perhaps he thinks I am fond of you, and that if you were dead I should feel your loss acutely. You believe me, dearest, when I say that I am innocent."

Warner bent down, and encircled her with his arms. He bore her to the sofa, and then he gave way. He sobbed and cried like a child, and Agnes wiped away his tears with her handkerchief, every now and then kissing his cheek with every sign of tenderness and affection.

When he got over the paroxysm which gave vent to his overwrought feelings, he said, taking her hand in his, and giving it a gentle pressure—

"It was so very dreadful to think that you were associated with Milani in his diabolical plot. It killed me almost to think it. I could not, at first, help harbouring the suspicion, so many things

assisted to give a colour to it. I cannot tell you how relieved I feel at knowing that you are not the Borgia, I am ashamed to say, I suspected. Oh, Agnes! you ought to be proud of my love. You might go through the world and never find anybody to love you as I do. Men might take a fancy to you for a time, but it would be something totally different from my love."

"If you had loved me so very much, you would not have doubted me," said Agnes, slyly.

"I couldn't help it; you must forgive me for it, and forget it."

"I could forgive you anything, you darling," replied Agnes, animated by a genuine feeling of affection.

Whether the new-born feeling was destined to be lasting or transitory, it was difficult to say, although butterfly natures are ever on the wing.

Warner was fully convinced, after this interview, that his wife was innocent of any design against his life. When the half-uttered but fully-implied accusation reached her ears in the first instance, she had shown every disposition to clear herself of so odious a suspicion with a frankness inherent in her nature. She had at once resented the allegation, and emphatically declared herself guiltless of the charge. Warner slept more easily that night than he imagined he should be able to; and Agnes endeavoured in every way in her power, by the exercise of those little feminine artifices which are pleasing to the sterner sex, to dissipate the gloom which had gathered round him. He had an enemy,

but it was not the wife of his bosom ; and so his foolish heart did not break, but overflowed once more with joy and gladness, such as he wished might last for ever. He did not think it prudent to prosecute Milani. In the first place, he had not sufficient evidence to convict him of an endeavour to assassinate him, and in the second, he wished to avoid the scandal the affair would create amongst all classes, and which would be as prejudicial to him as it would be to the Italian. He resolved to be upon his guard against him, and to use all his vigilance to defeat any fresh attempt that the fertile brain of Milani might organize. Agnes's treatment of him was so unexceptionally kind, that he began to think upon the adventure more in the light of a piece of good luck than the reverse, since it had only resulted in increased cordiality between himself and his wife.

CHAPTER XX.

MAKING APPROACHES.

FOR some little time Agnes lived happily with her husband ; she never wished to go to places of amusement of which he disapproved, and she acted the part in every way of an obedient wife. Warner did not care about visiting the opera, nor did he see anything of Milani. On the day ensuing after Warner's narrow escape, a report got about that Milani, having met with an accident through falling down some stairs, was so seriously shaken as to be unable to sing or appear upon the stage for a day or two. If Warner had entertained any doubt as to the identity of his masked assassin, that doubt would now have been dissipated.

Agnes was so shocked and horrified at the dastardly conduct of Milani that she did all she could to blot his image out of her mind. She fancied that he had become hateful to her, and she tutored herself as much as her wayward disposition would allow her, to regard the Italian as a man in every way unworthy of her notice. In thinking, however, that she had smothered and extinguished the embers of the fire which once burnt so brightly in Milani's favour, she deceived herself. There was still existent in the secret chamber of her heart a hidden germ which slowly smouldered, only requiring a

breath to fan it into a fierce and raging blaze, such as would consume all her pious resolutions, and burn up every intention that she had entertained for good. Like most women who devote their time to pleasure, Agnes was mentally frivolous. I cannot say that she had no mind, for she was a clever woman ; but, although she was naturally endowed with splendid faculties, she would not take the trouble to cultivate or improve them. She let them remain fallow : had she attended to them, they would have brought her in a rich crop. She could have mastered foreign languages ; she could have played on the piano ; she could have done twenty things which other studious women spend all their lives in trying to acquire, and fail in the attempt—their frantic efforts and despairing vehemence only hastening their end. Agnes could only boast of two attainments : she could talk to men and she could ride. She said she did not care about doing anything else. Those accomplishments had made her fortune ; so what was the use of a number of scholastic acquirements ?

How could Warner expect to keep such a woman at home, or hope to prevent her from finding amusement in some way or other more or less distasteful to his sense of propriety ? She had not lived quietly with him long before the old leaven began to break out, and the cloven hoof to show itself. A coldness sprang up between husband and wife. Warner's eccentricities showed themselves in a stronger and more marked light. He was accustomed in the morning, now and then, after breakfast, to go to

the yard of a cab proprietor, and hire a hansom which he found great amusement in driving through the streets, and picking up passengers. He asked Agnes repeatedly to let him drive up to the house and take her out in his cab ; but she steadily refused to countenance what she was pleased to call such mad goings-on. Ordering her carriage, she would go to the park, where cabs could not enter and the track of the hansom is not to be found.

One sunny afternoon in July Agnes drove through the ring, and thinking that the shade of the trees in Kensington Gardens would be very pleasant, she pulled the check-string. The footman descended from his pedestal, let down the steps with a clatter, and Agnes was about to alight, when a man stepped forward from a crowd of pedestrians, and with "Allow me the honour," gave her his arm. She found it impossible to refuse the proffered aid ; her gloved hand rested lightly on the support he gave her. She stood on the ground, and turning round confronted Milani.

Amazed at his audacity, she was deprived for an instant of the power of speech. All the indignant blood in her veins began to run riot in a revolutionary manner. The Italian, with the utmost and most admirable self-possession, kept his elbow bent. Agnes's hand still rested upon the sleeve of his coat. To have jerked it away was her first impulse ; but the pedestrians were so numerous at this particular time and spot, that a scene was most unenviable. Milani gently led her forward. With her features convulsed with rage, she obeyed his

almost impalpable lead. She would have given ten years of her life to have flown at him and torn him to pieces ; but the presence of the populace restrained her. Milani's countenance was inflexible ; not an emotion was displayed upon it—not a smile—not a sneer; no expression—sardonic, satanic, or triumphant.

They entered the gardens. People wondered who the beautiful fair lady, like the one in the story-book, “with the golden locks,” was, and who the dark, sinister-looking, but withal handsome, foreigner was. They crossed the broad path near the bridge. He led her. She followed passively. Once her face burned like fire. Two young men passed them. One remarked to the other—

“Isn’t that Milani?”

His friend replied—

“If the woman’s Agnes Willoughby—and it is rather her style—there can’t be a doubt about it.”

“Why,” she thought, “do men couple my name with a being I loathe, detest and abhor ?”

In saying this she proved that she was not acquainted with her own heart.

“It is shady by the side of the lake under the trees,” exclaimed Milani, in that melodious voice upon whose silvery accents thousands hung nightly.

Agnes did not speak : she would not trust herself to. She would have burst out into a torrent of invective—a very tornado of angry words, such as no woman may utter without loss of dignity and self-respect. So she held her peace. Down the sloping bank they went. She leaning upon his arm and deriving support from him. They reached

the end of the declivity, and Milani—like a pioneer—entered a belt of trees. Here they were out of the giddy throng. Here in this comparatively secluded spot they were free from interruption, and guarded by the thick foliage from the prying eyes by whom a look would have been followed by calumny and detraction. It was then that the spell which had lain upon Agnes's tongue was broken, and she fiercely exclaimed—

“ You dare to speak to me ; to treat me like this ; to carry me where you will like a child ? ”

“ I dare do it,” he replied, “ because my love makes me bold.”

“ Your love ! ”

Her laugh was so bitter, so scornful, so incredulous, as she spoke, it was a wonder that he did not put his fingers in his ears to exclude its harsh echo. There was a dash of despair in its ring which seemed to say—

“ Oh ! how grateful I should once have been for that avowal ; but now it comes too late : the dream is over—the charm has lost its efficacy and its virtue ! ”

He turned his dark-gleaming eyes upon her. They were like electric daggers, and their light poured through her. His mute appeal moved her somewhat.

“ Has it come to this ? ” she said ; “ are you to fall at my feet ? Has fate so far changed the aspect of everything as to turn the tables so completely ? If so, I am glad of it ; because it gives me the power of revenging myself upon you for all your slights

and insults, for all the bitter pangs you made me suffer when I was a suppliant for your love, and with cold determination you denied it me."

"The heart is an enigma," replied Milani. "I myself am puzzled and perplexed when I try to read it or understand the motives by which it is actuated. I only know that I love you. Why, I cannot tell. My heart informs me of the fact, and bids me intercede with you for your forgiveness. The past lays like a panorama before me, and I feel repentant. Maddened by the contemplation of what I have been guilty of, I look upon your face, and the tormenting picture vanishes. It is a good spirit, by its sacred influence banishing an evil one. I think of you and I pity you. I say to myself,—'This adorable girl, this paragon of beauty, who, had she been born a lady of rank, would have been her country's pride and her boast, is—*must* be—miserable. To what strait have I not, by my folly, my short-sighted obduracy, driven her? She has united herself to a boy who cannot appreciate her good qualities, and who is sure to single out those which are bad. Her life must with him be one perpetual round of misery. Harmony must be a stranger to their hearth, and misery the companion of each. I blame myself for this catastrophe, and I think whether she can find sufficient consolation in the bare and meagre fact of the splendid wretchedness being dignified and gilded over by the name of Mrs. Warner.'"

At the mention of her husband's name all her dormant tenderness for him revived. She thought

of the attempted assassination in the opera house. Milani was, of course, totally ignorant of Warner's cognizance of his being the would-be assassin. He was insensible when the fuzee was held to his face, and knowing the light to have been extinguished, he had imagined that his intended victim had, by some means, found his way out of the mazy intricacies of the place without discovering who his enemy was, or by whom his life had been threatened. So when Agnes replied to him, her words fell upon him like a thunderbolt, and put his self-possession to a severe test.

"Milani," she exclaimed, "you are a murderer in intent, if not in fact ; and that precludes the possibility of any intercourse between you and me. Let us part for ever. The world is wide enough : you take one path, I another. God will some day judge between us. A little while ago you might have twisted me round your finger ; I should have been a devoted slave to you. The picture is now changed : I have a duty to perform ; I am a wife, and, as such, I cannot have any sympathy or intercourse with the assassin of my husband."

"You do not know what you are saying," he replied, in a frigid tone, which she remarked to be slightly tremulous, as if the speaker were suffering from severe agitation.

"It is useless to deny it," replied Agnes ; "we have proof of your identity that cannot be set on one side. You are a bad man, Milani, and only blight those with whom you come in contact."

Slightly inclining his tall form, while a smile of

intelligence swept over and pervaded his classic countenance, he laid his hand upon her shoulder and said, in a softly-modulated voice, such as he might have used on the stage, for he was a superb actor—

“Look at me, carissima.”

She raised her eyes to his. Again his glance revelled in her own depths of liquid blue. Agnes shook from head to foot. Was the old, old feeling coming over her again?

“What do you see?” he demanded.

She hesitated, and made no reply.

“Do you see there the face of a murderer? No. You alone see the visage of a man who is deeply, devotedly, madly in love with you. I own to you that it was I—Milani—who endeavoured to kill the boy who had bought you with his name and his money; and I further fearlessly declare to you that my only regret is that my efforts were unavailing, and my endeavours futile. How I cursed the unskilfulness of my hand that night! How I tossed about in my bed and blasphemed the saints, when I thought that he would return to your arms unscathed and unhurt! Oh! my imagination is vivid, vivid enough, I promise you.”

His look, as he proceeded, became demoniacal; his manner wild and turgid. It alarmed Agnes. She would have flown from him, but she lacked the power to do so.

“You confess that you wished to kill my husband?” cried Agnes. “Do you know that by that confession you cut the ground from under your

feet? How can I ever feel anything but abhorrence for you after that? To me you are like Cain. There is a blood-red brand upon your brow. It scorches my eyes to look upon you."

"Agnes," he said, still keeping his hand upon her shoulder, and peering into her face as if he would read its hidden depths and construe all its springs of action, "let us reverse our positions. Imagine yourself the despairing lover. How would you have regarded *my* wife? Would you not have been ready to strangle her in her sleep, or smother her with an Othello-like vengeance. Think of this, and then have pity upon me. If it pleases you, the boy's life shall henceforth be sacred and inviolate for me. I merely thought that by removing him from my path my onward progress would be smoother. He was a thorn, a bramble, an unclean thing, and I wished to cut it off, and let it rot, forgotten and uncared for."

"I cannot bring myself to believe that you really love me," replied Agnes. "If you do, it is very strange—very remarkable. Why did you spurn me from you when I came to you? I told you I was going to marry some one, and I offered my hand to you. You rejected it, and that steeled my heart."

"I did not believe you," said Milani. "When by dint of inquiry I found that you had told me the truth, what did I do? I endeavoured in every way that lay in my power to stop your marriage, and I flattered myself I had succeeded. I was wrong, I know it now. I was wrong in not accept-

ing your proffered love. But I am of a haughty and tyrannical disposition. People have spoiled me by their flattery and their applause, and it pleased me to see you kneeling at my feet. There is an indescribable something in trampling upon the feelings of a lovely woman. It was my whim. I liked to see you humiliate yourself. I took a pleasure in reducing you and causing you to sink in your own esteem. It afforded me inexpressible gratification when you poured out your wealth of love at my feet, and almost beseeched me to reciprocate it. I did so secretly, but I would not let you see it. Imagine, then, my sensations when I heard that you had actually united yourself to this boy. It took my breath away. It paralysed me. For days I was not myself. In a moment of desperation, when I was well nigh distracted by brooding over what I considered my wrongs, I ~~a~~ tempted the boy's life. It will be no loss to the community, I thought. It is a worthless life, and she, least of all, will regret it. How different are things now! You are indifferent to me, and I am the beggar for the smallest crumb of love which you have it in your power to bestow."

During this harangue, for it was nothing else, Milani had brought all the machinery of his theatrical and operatic experience to bear, but Agnes was proof against his wily manner. His treatment of her was as yet too fresh in her memory to allow of her extending her forgiveness to him, or of her regarding him with the slightest favour. Nor did Milani expect that she would. He only went upon

the principle expressed in the first line of a favourite song in one of his operas. "La donna è mobile" was his motto, and the mainspring of his action. He knew that a strong fortress is not taken in a day. All he wished to do in the present interview was to make approaches under cover of which he could keep up a perpetual bombardment of the garrison until they surrendered. His reiteration of the fact that he loved Agnes was the Greek fire upon which he placed most confidence, fully anticipating that he was sowing seed which would some day bring forth the fruit that he appeared so ardently to wish for.

Retreating a step, Agnes released herself from the thrall he exercised over her. His hand fell to his side, and hung there still and motionless as if it had never grasped the dagger of the assassin or attempted the life of another.

"It is impossible, Milani," she said, "that there can be anything in common between us. I told you this after communing with myself. Once you might have made us both happy ; now it is hopeless. I have found other ties and connexions, you had better do the same thing ; forget me as I have tried to forget you. Avoid me as you would a pestilence. Do this for my sake. It only excites unpleasant memories in my breast when I see you, and when you are out of sight I will pray that you may be out of mind also. You are the rock upon which my happiness has been wrecked, and I cannot but look upon you as the author of much that I have suffered."

"So be it," he replied, with a dejected air. "You cannot love me. By my short-sightedness I have sacrificed all that I hold dear. It is a sort of suicide. I have only myself to accuse for it. We part, Agnes. Perhaps never to meet again. Go to your boy-husband. Simulate an affection that you cannot feel, and make him happy. It is your duty. Happy woman! Think when you are in the mood for meditation how Milani loved you. Think, I say, that you were regarded affectionately by a man of some mind, and, I do not say it boastfully, by a man who has by his acknowledged talent, won for himself a place amongst the celebrities of Europe—whose fame will live after him—whose life has not been in vain—to be whose wife would be to attain position such as many high-born ladies of rank and fortune would give their right hands for. These are some of the secrets of my life, but it is well that you should know them. It is all over now. I must bury my grief in my heart, and let it corrode it. It will eat like rust into the core, and then I shall be hard again, heartless, oblivious, callous. You cannot forget me if you would, Agnes, nor do I wish you to. It is right that you as well as myself should suffer. I leave you now; but the name of Milani shall ever be a talisman to stir your inner and most sacred feelings."

He bent suddenly forward as he finished speaking, gave her one hot, burning, impassioned kiss, the print of which rested on her cheeks in ruby-coloured marks for minutes, and then he walked proudly

away. She followed his majestic figure with her eyes until it was lost among the trees; and there she stood still like a block of marble. It was difficult for her at first to collect her thoughts. She was conscious of one event of great magnitude. Milani, whom she had formerly loved to distraction, had offered her his love. She had rejected his advances, and he had left her but a moment ago. Left her, and how? She had in her turn achieved a triumph, but she had driven him from her without affording him the least hope that she should ever reciprocate his affection, which she once prized dearly, but which she did not now care for. He had left her with a prophetic utterance upon his lips. He had said that the name of Milani should ever possess a magic and talismanic effect upon her, and she tacitly admitted the truth of this. However much she might affect to despise him, she felt that he would never be totally indifferent to her. She knew that she would be unable to repress an indescribable feeling whenever her thoughts reverted to him, or whenever men spoke of him in her presence, whether in words of censure or of praise. It had gratified her pride to make him suffer the same pangs that he had so often inflicted upon her, and she felt less unworthy of her own regard than she had done for many weeks. She walked back to her carriage, not being in the humour to mix with the gay promenaders after the trying interview she had just passed through. Going direct to her carriage, she ordered the coachman to drive home. As she passed along the side of the Serpentine she

saw Milani's stately form. He looked at her coldly without the least sign of recognition, nor did he raise his hat as he would have done at any other time. "At least," thought Agnes, annoyed, "he might be civil."

CHAPTER XXI.

WAR OR PEACE.

IT is extraordinary, but nevertheless true, that all people, however good looking they may be, are occasionally ugly. Beauty is not altogether derived from the regularity and exquisite formation of the features. It is the result, in most cases, of the expression of the face. A pretty woman with a scowl is an anomaly. Her prettiness deserts her directly she puts on the evil look. It is true that a bad thought generally makes a bad face. A continuation of foggy, gloomy weather has an influence upon people's countenances, while sunshine and its concomitants elevate the physiognomies of the masses into something that it is pleasant to regard. When Agnes reached her home, she looked at herself in the glass and was astonished to see the change that a few short hours had wrought in her. Her smile had left her, and she looked as if she had been grieving over the untimely death of some dear friend. Milani, she thought, was dead to her, and unknown to herself she had been lamenting over him. She flattered herself that she had strength of mind enough to forget him, but in reality she had not. Once removed from his presence she wished that she had the scene to go through again, when she would not have passed so final a sentence

upon him as she did. In spite of herself she began to look upon the Italian as an unhappy, persecuted man, who had allowed his pride to run him into all sorts of extravagances, the most of which had been the destruction of his happiness, and, unfortunately, of hers also.

"I hope," she muttered to herself, "that Warner will not come home just now; I shall recover myself presently. I suppose he is out cab-driving, or engaged in some of his mad games. I wonder old Lionel Cooper doesn't put his threat in execution."

It was singular that Warner's step-father had not given some sign of his existence since the marriage; but neither husband nor wife had heard a word from him or from others respecting him.

Three days passed, and during that time Agnes felt miserable. Her heart was possessed with a longing for she knew not what. She wished for something undefined, to which she dared not give a name or admit into shape; had it been resolved into a recognisable form, it would have taken that of Milani. But Agnes would not allow herself to whisper this name. It was shunned in her heart of hearts, and although she tried all she could to prevent it, Warner became more distasteful to her day by day. She allowed him to go out when he liked, and if he came home helplessly drunk she was pleased, because she was spared his caresses, which were becoming almost unendurable to her. The subtle Milani had calculated well, he knew how to again raise up the ghost of that old love, which Agnes, in her simplicity, had imagined laid

for ever. She was not acquainted with the force of first impressions, nor did she know their lasting properties and the effort required to efface and thoroughly eradicate them. On the morning of the third day after meeting Milani at Kensington Gardens, a note was brought her by her servant. Wilkins had departed, not in peace, but with what is called a flea in her ear. She had gone away abusing her mistress, declaring that she was as good as her ; and the next day after her dismissal she married a groom in a neighbouring mews, and with her savings took a beer-shop and amused herself every month in sending a petition round the neighbourhood for a spirit licence. It obtained numerous signatures ; but for some time the Bench refused her application, much to her disgust and that of the groom, who was obliged to luxuriate upon porter and four ale. The new servant in delivering the epistle, said that she had been told to give it to her mistress without allowing any one else to see it. Agnes told her in so many words that she was a fool. She said that she never received letters that she did not wish Mr. Warner to see, and that probably it was some bill—some debt of hers which a stupid tradesman thought she would like to keep secret. In conclusion, she warned her never to do such a thing again.

Agnes always took care to let her servants know that she did not care a straw for anything that they could say against her. But when the woman had left the room she trembled violently, for the handwriting upon the envelope was that of Milani. A

conflict now took place in her mind. Should she destroy the letter and so put a stop to what she thought was the beginning of a clandestine correspondence? Should she exert all her mental vigour and nip it in the bud? She hesitated; and by so doing she was lost. Had she promptly torn it into shreds all would have gone well, but this she had not sufficient courage to do. With unsteady fingers she broke the seal and read the letter. She was not in dread of her husband's coming downstairs. He had been out till late in the night, and he was not likely to rise till twelve or one. Besides, he would not have dared to ask her who her correspondent was if he had seen the letter lying in her lap. Milani wrote—

“I am going to leave England. I should like to see you before I sail for ever from these shores, from which you banish me. I could wish that it were not so; for I have met with nothing but kindness and hospitality from the generous islanders who are your countrymen. A word from you would restrain me, but that word I cannot hope that you will utter. I go out under good professional auspices. The manager of the opera house at St. Petersburg has telegraphed me a liberal offer. I shall accept it. The season here is over in a day or two. In Russia I may learn to forget yon. Will you accord me the poor favour, yet one which I shall prize beyond measure, of allowing me to press your hand once more before we part for ever in this world? My heart is not composed of marble if yours is. I am weak—I own it, and I am not

ashamed of my weakness. You will find me at my house whenever you may be disposed to call, if you yield to my urgent entreaty. I cannot come to yours, as perhaps your boy-husband might take offence at my temerity ; not that I care for his anger, but it might involve you in unpleasant consequences. Do not deliberate. Come !”

Agnes was not insensible to the sneer conveyed in the last paragraph of the letter, but she did not dwell upon it, as her mind was engrossed with the fact which she could at first scarcely credit—that Milani was going to Russia.

“Is it really true that he loved me so much ?” thought Agnes. “Poor fellow !”

This was the nearest approach she had yet made towards sympathy and commiseration.

She thought there could not be much harm in her yielding to his request, and seeing him before he left England.

“It will gratify him,” she reflected ; “and although it may make me miserable, perhaps I owe him some slight reparation for marrying in a hurry as I did, without waiting a little while to see what his real intentions were.”

This was fallacious reasoning. But women are weak, and Agnes was no exception to the general character borne by her sex. All that is required to conquer them is a glozing tongue, endless adulation, and continued assiduity.

She resolved that she would go that very day and see Milani ; she expected to derive a melancholy pleasure from bidding him a final adieu. He

was the candle, she the silly moth whose wings were far too pretty to be singed by so pernicious a flame. Milani sat like a venomous spider in his web awaiting the coming of the infatuated fly.

On her arrival at Milani's house, she found him evidently on the look-out for her. He received her tenderly, thanked her for coming, and assured her that her presence gave him more happiness than he could express in words.

Agnes replied that she did not come to him to hear fulsome flattery, but to perform a painful duty in wishing him good-bye before he left the country for a long voyage, perhaps for ever.

"Life," she said, "is uncertain, and it is impossible to foretel one's fate."

"Pardon me, dearest Agnes," exclaimed Milani; "I have no real intention of going away from England. That part of my letter was merely a *ruse*, which I conceived was perfectly fair, and which I relied upon to obtain your assent to my request. I admit that I have deceived you; but you must not be angry with me because my love has carried me beyond the bounds of discretion."

Agnes passionately moved toward the door. She had been entrapped into an interview she would rather have avoided. To wish him farewell was one thing, to listen to his solicitations was another. The first she had consented to do out of pity—the latter she would not accede to on any account whatever. Milani divined her intention, and, in order to prevent her flying from him in so abrupt a manner, by a sudden movement which, in strategic

language, would be called a flank one, he gained the door first, hastily locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

"I cannot let you go, Agnes, until you have heard what I have to say to you," he exclaimed. "I am a desperate man; you must not provoke me too much. Hear me, and you shall go quietly; but I must unburden my mind. Since I saw you I have had no peace. How I have gone through my professional duties is a mystery to me. When at the theatre every Norma, every Amina is an Agnes to me."

"It is a wonder you do not say every Traviata also," exclaimed Agnes. "After the things you have said to me, that would not surprise me a bit. You had better include that in the list."

Every vestige of sentiment had departed from her mind since she had discovered herself to be the dupe of the crafty Italian. She had assumed her old familiar, bantering strain, which she knew would be ten times more embarrassing than the unconventional language people employ when their minds are worked upon.

"You should not say that," he replied; "I am the last to throw anything of that sort in your teeth."

Agnes, finding that she was fairly in for a battle with Milani, sat down in a chair, and toyed with her parasol.

"You did not always think so," she said; "you have not always been so delicate and so thoughtful. But, my dear fellow, I don't care a pin's head now

what you say to me. I am the wife of a gentleman who is infinitely superior to any professional. In my opinion professionals are not much better than tradesmen. Both are dependent upon the public for their support. If a man sells bad tea, he loses his business ; if an Italian swell sings badly, he gets the sack, and nobody will give him twopence, while Gye and Lumley turn their backs on him."

Milani grinned in a ghastly manner. He could have lost his temper with the greatest delight, but it did not suit him just then to do it.

"Talent in any sphere of life always brings its own reward," he replied.

"Its reward in some cases is not gentility," said Agnes, provokingly. "Your self-made men are generally the biggest bears a woman can pick up with. I would rather not discuss the question with you, for it might hurt your feelings ; but I must say this, I prefer a poor gentleman to a rich cad."

"I was a poor gentleman in my own country," exclaimed Milani, whose pride compelled him to vindicate himself against her sarcastic reproaches.

"So you have told me before," she replied, incredulously. "I really should not have believed it, though, had you not told me so. Of course, as you say so, you must have been."

There was a slight smile upon her face which irritated him.

"Perhaps you will disbelieve me if I tell you there is noble blood in me," he said.

"I have heard that, too, before ; can't you pull up your sleeve, and show it me ?" she answered.

"Ah!" said Milani, philosophically, "your remarks will not alter facts, any more than your new historian, Froude's writings will change the landmarks of history."

"I am not chaffing, my dear Prince, or my dear Duke—which are you going to be to-night, eh? You have no doubt personated swells so often, that you feel quite regal. Wouldn't you like to have a palace? Come now; you should petition Parliament for a set of rooms at Hampton Court or Kensington! I dare say Lord Palmerston would give them you. He gave Close fifty pounds a-year for writing rubbish; and you are a great man in your own estimation, which ought to be some slight recommendation."

"Have you finished?" he asked, more quietly than she expected.

Agnes began to have a suspicion that Milani's passion for her was genuine; that when he behaved so cruelly to her, he had only been disguising his real feelings, and throwing a blind over the actual state of his mind. Yet she did not intend to reciprocate his affection. She was unable to resist the recurrence of a fraction of the former liking for him; but she was sensible enough to know that if she compromised herself in any way with Milani, she should at once forfeit her position, make her husband her enemy, and jeopardize everything she now possessed. She would, by so doing, place herself more than ever in the power of the fickle Italian, who first blew cold and then hot. And she was sufficiently well acquainted with Warner to know

that he was too much a man of honour and a gentleman to countenance her for a moment after she had gone wrong with any one else. What she had done before he had cast a veil over and forgiven, but a fresh offence committed under the broad canopy of his name he could not and would not forgive. It might cost him very dear to discard her ; but there are other things in life worth existing for besides the gratification of the senses, and the realization of a state of semi-Utopian bliss. So she resolved to play out this little drama with Milani, and to return to her home with the skeleton of her old love in her heart, which she would shroud there and weep over ; but not even the Italian should know that the ghastly thing existed.

When he asked her if she had finished she replied—

“ For the present I have.”

“ Then I can speak to you. I sent for you, Agnes, because I wished to make a last appeal. I love you more now than I ever did. I can’t tell why ; but such is the fact. I feel as if I could not live without you. I have fought against this growing passion, but without avail.”

“ It is a pity,” interrupted Agnes, “ that it was not born earlier. You remember that night at the theatre, and again in this room in this house ?”

“ Forget that,” he replied ; “ take me for what I am now. Let the past be the past. I want to make a most serious appeal to you. Will you leave your husband and live with me ?”

“ Will I ?” said Agnes, with flashing eyes. “ I

would not live with you now, Milani, as your wife. And I am not such a fool as to cut a good man to be your woman."

He was abashed at this reply. Like a desperate gambler he had staked a great issue upon a single cast of the dice, and his throw had miscarried.

"Why you must be a fool," she continued. "Have I ever shown any indication of insanity? Have you ever seen anything about me which would lead you to think that I am out of my mind? Why should I leave a man who thinks that I am all the world to him for a man like you? I should have no hold over you. There would be no tie between us. You might begin to lead me a life after I had been a couple of days with you. You are not better off than Warner. You cannot love me more, and you have, as I well remember, treated me infamously more than once. A child who has burnt his fingers doesn't like fire. I am the child—you are the fire; and I don't like you. You and the element are all very well at a distance; but one may get too close to you."

"So you wont do what I ask you?" he exclaimed, while the veins in his face grew black and big.

"No; not if you attempt to murder me," she replied, defiantly.

"You will be sorry for this," cried Milani, pacing the room in a state of great excitement. "I swear it! and I never yet took an oath in vain. I swore that I would be revenged on the boy for snatching you from my grasp, and, although I failed once, I will be sure next time. There is such a thing as a

living grave, and it is more terrible than that formed by cold clay of a churchyard."

"It is very brave of you to talk to me in this way, isn't it?" sneered Agnes. "I suppose you think I'm alone with you and can't help myself; but if you go on much longer, I'll show you what I can do. You had a taste of my temper once before, and you had better look out, or you will have another. I haven't got a diamond bracelet on this time, mind. I knew where I was coming, so I left all my jewellery at home."

"Once for all," demanded Milani, heedless of her banter, "is it war? There are my two hands—(he held them out)—peace in the right, war in the left; which will you have?"

"I don't care a d——," replied Agnes, "for all your acting. You won't frighten me, my dear fellow; I wasn't born yesterday, nor yet the day before. You ought to get hold of some silly fool of a girl who knows nothing, and who would be impressed by you. I am not, you see. I never shall be, if you act yourself silly, which I wish to God you would do."

"You have chosen war," he replied, "just as much as if you had grasped my left hand."

"I grasp it!" she cried; "I wouldn't touch it with the end of a pitch-fork. And now just let me out, will you? I'm tired of this little pantomime. If you don't, I'll smash all the windows and bring the police in."

Milani turned very white.

Agnes perceived this, and exclaimed—

"I always thought you were a white-livered beast! Your face is the colour of paper, now."

He glared at her with a ferocious aspect, but thinking it prudent to comply with her request for egress, he put the key in the door, opened it, and said between his teeth, in a sibilant whisper—

"As there is a sun in heaven, so you shall regret this, and repent it in ashes and sackcloth!"

Agnes's only response to this was—

"Don't be a fool; look after the *corps de ballet*—you will find some one quite as jolly as I am. Make her some of your splendid offers; she'll jump o'er the moon at them."

And with a light step and a lighter laugh she ran down the steps and got into her carriage, which whirled her quickly along the Clapham Road in the direction of Vauxhall Bridge. Milani stood with the door in his hand for some time gazing after her. At last, when the carriage was out of sight, he muttered to himself—

"Disease of the brain—let us try that!"

And, with a black cloud, as it were, overhanging his face, he re-entered his house.

CHAPTER XXII.

DISEASE OF THE BRAIN.

UNFORTUNATELY Agnes was not sufficiently well acquainted with the character of Milani ; had she been, she would never have ventured to incur his enmity as she had done ; she would rather have endeavoured to smooth down his passionate anger and allay his wrath, which he did not take the trouble to disguise. She had wounded the pride of a most sensitive man, and he was one of those who do not know how to forgive. There are many whose peculiar composition and retentive memories will not allow them to forget, but mindful of the example of One whose precepts are for all time, they school themselves to pardon the offence of which their enemies have been guilty. Milani could do neither one nor the other. His was essentially a vicious nature, in which there was more of devil than of the higher element ; he would pursue those who had laid themselves under the lash of his resentment with the relentless pertinacity of a bloodhound ; and when his prey was fairly run to earth, he knew how to worry and mangle it against any hound that was ever pupped. Before his interview with Agnes, he had only hated Warner—now he included her in his black list, and sat in judgment upon both of them. It is unnecessary to say that this anomalous tribunal condemned

them—not exactly to be hanged by the neck until they were dead, but to severe pains and penalties, nevertheless. He worked in the dark, but his blows told ; his shots hit the mark they were aimed at. A day or two afterwards Warner met Milani and Lionel Cooper walking arm-in-arm in St. James's Street. They neither of them took the slightest notice of him. Milani did not do so because he feared that Warner would show him the cold shoulder ; Lionel Cooper did not, because he imagined, in his pride, that his stepson's marriage with a loose woman severed all the tics of kindred, and placed him altogether without the pale of forgiveness. Half expecting some such treatment, Warner did not expose himself to the risk of being snubbed. He waited for either Cooper or the singer to nod to him or hold out a hand ; they did not, so he looked in a contrary direction, and walked on as if he had not seen them.

“ I should like to let old Cooper know what sort of a fellow he is walking with, upon my word I should,” he muttered.

But being an easy-going fellow, his anger soon wore off, and when he reached the Haymarket, he dropped in, as Sam Weller says, “ promiscuous,” at the “ Windham Arms,” to get a glass of ale and wake up the “ Birmingham,” if that elongated personage should happen to be doing his morning drain. To his gratification, the Giant was standing at the bar, in the company of a waiter who was known as “ Sowshong.” He was a middle-aged man, dark and leathery-looking, slightly oleaginous as to his

attire, and, taken generally, rather dozy than otherwise. He had acquired his nickname through a proposition he once made to a little barmaid upon whom he was spoony. Waiters are as susceptible of the tender passion as those who wear strawberry leaves. He asked her to go to Hampstead Heath, and in order to make the journey more attractive, he gave her the history of a visit he paid to the hostelry called "Jack Straw's Castle."

"Where are yer going on Sunday?" he began. "Come to 'Ampstead 'Eath, Polly; it is a place. There was me and Tom Lockyer and 'Arry 'Arris, we went the three on us up to 'Ampstead in a 'bus—thruppence a 'ed on the knife-board—and we had tea—real Sowshong, none of your Peko—Sowshong, I tell yer, and shrimps, oh! andfuls there was, as many as you could eat, and over, there was. We 'ad tea—Sowshong, shrimps, and toast—and 'Arry 'Arris, he well-nigh bursted over it. It was a blow-out, Polly, and didn't come to no more than nine-pence a cheek. Me and Tom Lockyer tossed—I wasn't going to stand Sam—he skying to me; it was a copper, and I cried woman—that put 'im out; it was atween me and 'Arry 'Arris then. Well, I spun the brown, and 'Arry he cried; but I jockeyed 'em both. You come to 'Ampstead 'Eath, Polly, and have some Sowshong. Oh my, it was fine! Real Sowshong, I tell yer; none o' yer Peko!"

Polly was too much amused at this story not to circulate it, so everybody in future called him Sowshong. He did not care, however—he seemed

rather to like it. The Giant was drinking some bitter beer—for he was potent at potting—and devouring, in a half-famished manner, a foot of black pudding and a hunch of bread.

“Mornin’, squire,” exclaimed the Giant, on seeing Warner; “I was coming down to your crib to tell you of a bit of sport that’s coming off at the ‘Duke’s Head.’”

“What is it, rabbit coursing?” asked Warner.

“Rabbit coursing!” echoed the Giant, contemptuously; “no—it’s a rattin’. Bill’s going to bring one or two of his tykes, and you’ll av some fun, or I aint six feet high.”

“Well, Sowshong, how are you?” said Warner.

“Nicely, thank you, sir,” replied Sowshong; “how’s the missus?”

Warner did not condescend to respond to this query, but turning to the Giant, said—

“Where’s that terrier bitch of mine? You might take her.”

“She’s right enough—all brandy!” replied the Birmingham.

“What are you going to do with all that pudding?” said Warner, amazed at the quantity which was yet unconsumed.

“Try and eat it, guv’nor,” responded the Giant, gruffly.

Thinking the Giant would be in a better temper if he was left to himself for some little time, or at any rate, until he had finished his lunch, Warner gave him a poke in the ribs, saying—

"You must be an old gormandizer," and addressed himself again to Sowshong. "What's your tap, this morning?" he asked.

"I'll have a drop of gin, cold," replied Sowshong; "what'll you take, sir?"

"You may get me the same," said Warner.

Sowshong went to the bar, and said—

"Two drops of Old Tom, cold, miss, please."

Being furnished with the required beverage, he returned to his patron, and handing him a glass, raised his own to his lips, with "Good 'elth, sir."

Warner nodded.

"You aint got 'arf-a-crown about you, sir?" said Sowshong, in a whisper. He was afraid the Giant might think he was poaching on his ground.

Warner took two out of his pocket, and threw them down with a chink on the leaden counter. The Birmingham noticed this little by-play, and as Sowshong passed him to pick up the coins, he brought his elephantine hand down on his back with a vehemence that took his breath away.

"Oh!" groaned Sowshong.

"Don't you get sucking my eggs, then," exclaimed the Giant. "It wont wash."

Sowshong pocketed the money, and kept at a respectful distance.

Warner laughed, and said—

"Squeeze a pewter, Birmingham."

The Giant took up a quart pot, and, without the least apparent exertion, flattened it like a pancake between his huge fists. Then he threw it carelessly in a corner, and went on with his lunch.

Warner was much pleased, and said to himself, "I think I am the only man about town who has got a Giant. There is a touch of genius about it."

He did not return from the ratting at the Duke's Head until late. Agnes was out ; but the servant told him that two strange gentlemen were waiting to see him in the drawing-room. Without taking his hat off he walked in, and found a couple of men, attired in rusty black, talking together by the window. They advanced to meet him, and each handed him a card. On one was inscribed, "Dr. Comeit Strong," and on the other, "Mr. Sylam."

"Who are you ?" exclaimed Warner, abruptly, "and what do you want ?"

"Only a little conversation with you, my dear sir. Don't excite yourself ; it is altogether unnecessary, I assure you," replied Dr. Strong.

Warner looked at his visitors in great perplexity. Who were they, and what did they want ?

He found it rather difficult to answer these questions, but as he had been drinking freely, he was not in the humour for trifling or for wasting time in mere courtesy.

"Look here," he exclaimed ; "I don't want any d—— nonsense. If you can't say what your game is, you'd better hook it. If you are any of those collecting fellows, I haven't got any money."

Dr. Comeit Strong looked at his colleague, and shook his head.

"Don't stand there shaking your head," cried Warner, getting into an ungovernable rage, "because I wont have it. This is my house, and the

sooner you slope the better it will be **for** your health."

"I am a doctor," said Dr. Comeit Strong.

"Well!" ejaculated Warner.

"To be brief, I have been sent by your friends, to examine into the state of your—your—"

"Spit it out, old fellow," cried Warner. "You're not half a cock."

The man's stuttering manner made him laugh.

"Your mind, I was going to say."

"My mind!" almost screamed Warner, jumping up from the chair he was sitting in. "That's their game, is it? Now I know where we are. Just you two sit down, and I'll convince you that I am as sane as either of you. This is a matter far more serious than I at first anticipated. So that's their game, is it? Blast them! Dr. Strong, if I was a little violent to you when I first came in, you must put it down to my having been out all day, and feeling a little slewed. I am all right now, though. I know what importance all you fellows attach to a man's manner, when you think him not all there. So this explanation may not be altogether unnecessary. Just sit down, will you? What will you take?"

"Thank you," replied Dr. Comeit Strong, "anything you have in the house."

"I have everything. Will you have some champagne or some claret? It's very hot to-day—have some claret."

"I should prefer something iced, I think. What do you say, Mr. Sylam?"

"Certainly, sir, certainly," replied Mr. Sylam.

"Iced!—of course you don't suppose I should offer you anything that wasn't," said Warner, irritably.

"Sadly impatient," whispered Dr. Comeit Strong to Mr. Sylam.

Warner overheard the remark, and supplemented it by saying—

"And so would you be, if you were so infernally badgered as I am. Just touch that bell, will you, Mr. Sylam?"

At hearing himself addressed so pointedly, Mr. Sylam started as if he had put his naked foot on a red-hot coal; but instantly recovering himself, he said—

"Certainly, sir, certainly;" and did as he was told.

When the man answered the summons, Warner exclaimed—

"Bring out some champagne and some claret."

The footman obeyed, and placed glasses and bottles on the table. Warner did the honours, the two medical men electing to have champagne. They imbibed the liquor with considerable satisfaction, and resumed their seats, smiling and looking hot and flustered. At home they did not get beyond threepenny half-and-half. Wine was a luxury that their moderate incomes would not permit of, if we except the South African of Foster and Ingle, which they indulged in only on state occasions, such as the signing of the certificate of the insanity of a new patient, or something equally brilliant.

They were mad doctors, but they were to their principal what the jackal is to the lion. The man who employed them was a great man in his way. His name was Ruby Blood, and he kept an asylum at Kensington, but he did not go so far as to put his name to the certificates upon which people were admitted within the gates of his prison. He was often called upon to perform a nefarious piece of business—in plain English, to shut up people who were no more mad than he was himself. There was always the chance of this fraud being detected, so he kept Messieurs Comeit Strong and Sylam as buffers or scapegoats. If popular indignation and clamour were to be raised against him, he would put out a buffer in each hand ; Comeit Strong and Sylam would shield him from the consequences of his iniquitous proceedings. Comeit Strong saw the risk of what he was doing, but when Mr. Ruby Blood met with him, he picked him literally out of the gutter, and he was glad to do anything for a living. He tacked on Doctor to his name, and went in for wholesale imprisonment. He saved what little money he could scrape together. He had an ambition—not a very laudable one—he wanted to go into the quack doctor line as soon as he could collect funds enough to take a house and furnish it. Mr. Sylam aspired to pills. He had invented a nostrum, and he hoped some day to rival Holloway and Cockle. One day, after doing a good stroke of business, he broached a bottle of Cape sherry with Comict Strong, and getting fuddled over it fancied he had lost the receipt of his medicine.

He immediately began to cry like a seraphin—that is, continuously, until he found the paper on which it was written hidden amongst a quantity of fluff in a corner of his waistcoat pocket. Mr. Sylam was a man of few words, his favourite ones being “Certainly, sir, certainly.”

As to their personal appearance, the men were dirty, shabby, and shaggy ; flat as to their features, rotund as to their persons, splay as to their feet, and baggy as to their breeches, which reeked, as did the rest of their attire, of Petticoat Lane, and the bag of an old clo’ man.

Warner replenished their glasses, which they speedily emptied. Seeing the avidity with which they drank his wine, he conceived the idea of making them both drunk, and then kicking them into the street. It was a foolhardy thing to do, but it was his whim, and he resolved to do it if he could.

“I’ll make them mix their liquors,” he said to himself. “If that doesn’t lick them, I don’t know what will.”

Taking out a decanter of sherry, he forced some upon their acceptance. They drank it like mother’s milk.

“You like sherry, Mr. Sylam, I hope,” said Warner.

“Certainly, sir, certainly,” replied Mr. Sylam. He added—*sotto voce*—“I like anything that’s good.”

“Now, gentlemen, examine me, question me—I am ready to stand any test you like to subject me to,” exclaimed Warner.

Dr. Comeit Strong collected himself, raked up his stock interrogations, and putting on an important air, said—

“What do you think, sir, of the Differential Calculus, and the claims of Mr. Babbage to public sympathy with respect to organ-grinders?”

Dr. Comeit Strong looked round for approbation; his factotum caught his eye.

“That’s a fair question?” he said.

“Certainly, sir, certainly,” replied Mr. Sylam.

“I am not a mathematician,” answered Warner, “and therefore I cannot know anything about the Calculus; as to Babbage, if he doesn’t like organs, he ought to go where there are none. I don’t see why the poor devils shouldn’t get a living because he does not like a kind of music that delights thousands of servants and children, who never have a chance of hearing any other.”

“We’ll try you again, sir—we’ll try you again,” said Dr. Comeit Strong. “What would you think of a man who went forty miles to confess to Dr. Pusey?”

“I should look upon him as a conscientious High Churchman,” replied Warner.

Dr. Strong took out a note-book, and made an entry. He wrote—reply to first question: Spoke at random; second: Strongly opinionated.

“Now, sir, once more, if you please,” he exclaimed, in the tone of voice a tailor employs when he is measuring you, and feels alarmed lest he has mistaken you about the abdomen: “If the cerebrum is upset, will that agitate the cranium; and

if so, what effect will it have upon the caput? Also be good enough to state its ultimate result as regards the os frontis and the organ of philoprogenitiveness?"

"Well, I'll be hanged if I know!" said Warner. "I was five years at Eton, and I was in middle fifth when I left, so I ought to know something of Latin, but it is out of my power to satisfy your curiosity on the point you have submitted to me."

To help out the pause that followed, Warner gave his guests some more wine. Dr. Comeit Strong thought a little while, and then resumed his examination.

"Given an animal of the feline species—the felis of Linnæus, or common cat—shod with walnut-shells, required the amount of noise she would make in tramping over an oaken corridor for the space of ten minutes in the dead of the night. This question," he added, "was to test the patient's knowledge of acoustics."

"That depends entirely," replied Warner, "upon the locomotion of the feline animal. If the cat went quickly, she would make more noise than if she trotted or stood still."

Dr. Strong made an entry against this answer to this effect: Strongly indicative of incipient imbecility.

"Mr. Sylam," said the doctor, "it is your turn."

"Certainly, sir, certainly," rejoined Mr. Sylam. "Let me see. Oh! question number five. I know; it's all right; you needn't look at me. Now, sir,

if your grandfather's uncle's first cousin-german were to be shut up in a lunatic asylum, should you consider yourself justified in committing a murder on the grounds of hereditary insanity ; or, if not justified, in claiming a commutation of your sentence, after conviction, on the said grounds ?"

"I shall refer you to Dr. Forbes Winslow for that," replied Warner, with a smile.

"Oh ! you would, sir, eh ! Well, allow me to put another question to you."

"As many as you like," said Warner, with an equable demeanour.

"If Holloway's pills cost threepence, and the stamp is ninepence, how much would that be a box —no, that isn't it—I mean——"

But it was very clear that Mr. Sylam did not know what he meant—the wine was getting into his head. Dr. Comeit Strong recalled him temporarily to himself by a stern look, but he was incapable of examining any further. He leaned back listlessly in his chair and began, in an insane manner, to count the number of roses in the pattern of the paper. It was an endless task, for his excited vision magnified them into a legion sufficient to stock the attar-yielding beds of Persia.

"Have you finished ?" inquired Warner.

"No," exclaimed Mr. Sylam, utterly forgetful of decorum, relinquishing his numerical occupation for a moment. "I've got 'nother question, old boy. What d'ye give bottle for yer champagne ? Send 's a dozen, will yer ? Name of Sylam—know me ; good sort, 'sure yer."

"I shall talk to you," said Warner, looking a Dr. Comeit Strong. "Have you done with me? because I want my dinner. Your friend seems a little overcome."

"A fit, sir—a fit," replied the doctor.

"Then I should say it was a 'tight' fit," exclaimed Warner, venturing upon a pun.

"Oh! bless you, he's used to them."

"If he is, I am not; so you will excuse my asking you to liberate me as soon as you conveniently can."

"I have made an end, sir," replied Dr. Comeit Strong, "and with your permission I will take another glass of wine with you. Let me drink your speedy restoration to your normal condition of mind."

"My what? Why, you don't mean to say that I'm mad?" exclaimed Warner.

"As a March hare, my dear sir," replied the doctor, holding up a glass of wine, looking at it critically with one eye, and bearing every evidence of being on the verge of intoxication. "It is a melancholy fact, but you're mad 's hatter," he continued; "da—dang'rous lun'tic."

"Why, you thundering old blackguard," cried Warner, rushing up to him, "out you go. Come on!"

He collared the unfortunate doctor, and dragging him through the room and across the passage, opened the street-door and kicked him headlong down the steps. He fell in the gutter at the foot of a policeman. The fall partially roused him,

and he looked up. Seeing the policeman, he said,—

“See that? that’s an ‘sault.”

“Yes,” replied Warner, “and the peeler will see another directly.”

He returned to the drawing-room, and laid violent hands upon Mr. Sylam.

“Come along,” he cried.

“Certainly, sir, certainly,” murmured Mr. Sylam, in an almost inaudible tone. He speedily joined his companion in the gutter, and Warner retired into his house, shutting the door after him.

He was not at all sorry to have got rid of the pertinacious gentlemen, who resembled notes of interrogation, in that they were always asking questions. He looked out of the window and saw the policeman request the mad doctors to go home; but they appeared to have the “staggers,” they could not walk straight, they swayed about this way and that, so the policeman, for he had no option in the matter, marched them both off to the station-house for being drunk and incapable in a public thoroughfare. Warner was much amused at this sequel to the adventure. He congratulated himself upon having behaved with great moderation; he had preserved his temper, and he considered that he had not given them the smallest peg whereon to hang an accusation against him. But he was not acquainted with the iniquitous system upon which lunatic asylums are conducted in this country, in spite of the Lunacy Commissions and the other State machinery, which is looked upon as satisfactory, but

which is in reality far from being so. There are so many forms of madness, that if you behave yourself rationally, you are told your mania is only chronic ; and if you at last allow yourself to be goaded into madness, they declare you have broken out at last ; if you are quiet and docile, you are suffering from amentia, your brain is softening, and you are gradually becoming idiotic ; if you are fond of reading, that's the particular form of your madness—you are insane on the subject of books ; if you have a theory or a grievance, there is no question but that you are a harmless lunatic. Suppose you think the Commons behaved badly in cutting off Charles the First's head, and you feel strongly on the subject. the doctor will say. " Try him about Charles the First ; that's his madness."

Warner had got to experience all this ; at present he lived in a glass-house, and he did not know how fragile his vitreous habitation was.

When Agnes came home he told her of the visit that had been paid him, adding,—

" The fellows did not get much out of me. They took nothing by their motion ; I was as quiet as I could be ; and the best of the joke is, I made them both so drunk that they couldn't stand, then I kicked them into the street, and a bobby walked them off for being tight."

" I wish I had been here," replied Agnes ; " I would have made them more so, or I'd have known the reason why. Why, my darling, you are no more mad than they are. You may be odd sometimes, and have your own particular fancies and

tastes, but most people have. If you are mad, there are heaps of people who are howling lunatics compared to you. Why, they might say I was mad. I never heard such nonsense."

"I don't think they will come again," he remarked.

"It is that old beast, Lionel Cooper!" exclaimed Agnes; "and I should not wonder if Milani had a hand in it."

His threats, when she last parted with him, came across her mind, and she feared that he was beginning to put his fiendish machinery in motion.

This was the interview upon which Messrs. Comeit Strong and Sylam founded their opinion that Warner was suffering from disease of the brain.

CHAPTER XXIII.

VI ET ARMIS.

SOME days passed and Warner heard no more of the mad doctors. Owing to the lapse of time, he thought the attempt of his enemies had been frustrated by the way in which he had received the two men who had been sent to report on the state of his mind. He fancied that he had thrown them off the scent, and that he had in every way conducted himself in a manner to prove that their suspicions were unfounded and their premises incorrect. Agnes, however, was not so sanguine. She advised him to be always on his guard, or else he might be kidnapped and hurried off to an asylum without a moment's warning, and without leaving any trace behind him. Warner laughed at her fears, and said he thought he was a match for any amount of mad doctors ; but in this he was mistaken, for one day as he was walking along a quiet road in the neighbourhood of his house he was set upon by four men, and before he could offer the slightest resistance his hands were tied behind him. He indignantly asked one of them why they treated him in so shameful and unjustifiable a manner. He received no answer. They hurried him into a cab, three getting inside with him, the fourth sitting on the box. His captors were all men of great phy-

sical strength. They seemed to have been selected for some particular duty on account of their muscular development. Their faces were stolid and repulsive. It occurred to Warner that they were the keepers of a private lunatic asylum. The only interpretation he could put upon the strange proceeding was that Dr. Strong and Mr. Sylam had certified him to be insane, and that he was being carried off upon the strength of their report and opinion. Yet when he calmly reflected he could scarcely believe it possible that they could have lent themselves to so iniquitous an arrangement. Lionel Cooper he knew had given him up altogether since the scene which had taken place in the hotel at Paris. Milani, for some cause or other—probably through jealousy, owing to his having married the woman that the Italian was fond of—hated him in a most venomous manner ; and it was extremely probable that finding his first attempt had been frustrated, and that he was unable to deprive him of life, he had resorted to the devilish expedient of having him incarcerated as a man out of his senses. It was a horrible thing to do ; a most fiendish manner of revenge. He would be cut off from all his friends, from the wife to whom he was dearly attached. He would be deprived of all those enjoyments that make existence worth having, and he would be left to pine away and die of melancholy and inanition in a loathsome prison-house which resembled the Bastile, inasmuch that people could be confined within its walls upon a sort of *lettre de cachet* without the formality of a trial, and upon the

word of two doctors whom nobody knew, without reputation, worthless and degraded wretches, who would have consigned their own father to Tophet for a five-pound note had it been in their power to do so. As Warner contemplated the fate that was so transparently before him he shuddered. But his uneasiness was not of long duration, for with the volatile disposition of youth he partially recovered his serenity before they had gone far, and began to cast about in his mind for some means of extricating himself from the position in which the machinations of his enemies had placed him. He had been abducted by force of arm, and he could not help contrasting his arrest with that of a similar affair in the days of the Bourbon kings of France. His keepers were silent as mutes, and one and all preserved a stoic reticence. If he addressed himself to them they refused to answer his questions, so he gave up the attempt in despair. Here he was being buried alive in the midst of a civilized community, without a hand stretched out to save him, and without a soul aware of the doom to which he was being consigned. A hope sustained him. It was that he should be able to convince the proprietor of the place to which he had no doubt he was being driven that he was labouring under a delusion in thinking him mad ; or if that attempt should fail, he would succeed in bribing some one connected with the place to assist him to escape. The cab entered Piccadilly at the circus end, and Warner, who was looking out of the window—a privilege his captors were kind enough to allow him, happened to see the

Birmingham Giant standing at a corner waiting to cross over. Before either of the keepers could prevent him, Warner put his head out of the window and shouted at the top of his voice—

“Birmingham! Stop the cab!”

The next instant he was dragged with brutal violence into the vehicle, and held forcibly on the cushion. His heart beat quickly. He could not tell whether the Giant had heard him or not. If he had, he was in a measure saved. If not, he had wasted his time in making the effort. The three men glanced savagely at him, and looked as if they would like to inflict severe corporal punishment upon him for his audacity in setting them at defiance, at so far outwitting them as to call the attention of some friend in the street to his desperate condition. Warner had not to wait more than a minute before he found that his hail had not only been heard but responded to. The Giant had caught sight of Warner’s head at the cab window, and the summons to stop the cab was sufficiently explicit to be at once acted upon. He went at a run after it, and seized the horse by the bridle, bringing it to a standstill. The cabman, terrified at his gigantic size, made no resistance. He pulled up quietly near the pavement, although the man on the box exhorted him energetically to go on.

“Too good a judge,” exclaimed the Giant. “Knows his book too well; don’t you, cabby?”

Going to the cab door he opened it without any ceremony, and took stock of the occupants.

Warner would have jumped into the street, but his keepers detained him by force.

The Giant opened his mouth with astonishment when he saw the position his patron was in. He could not understand it. He was not in the power of policemen, or they would have been in uniform. Who were they, then, and why had they bound Warner's arms? It was a mystery to him.

"What's all this 'ere, sir? It's a rummy go to me," he exclaimed.

"Why these fellows have carried me off," replied Warner, "and I believe they are going to take me to a lunatic asylum."

"We have authority for what we are doing," said one of the men.

"They have refused to show it to me," cried Warner. "Make them produce it to you."

"In the twinkle of an eye," replied the Giant, turning to the man who had spoken. "Now, guv'nor, prodoose the dockiment, or some one, I wont say who, 'll have a welting."

The keeper saw that he had an ugly customer to deal with, so he complied with the request, extracting a paper from his pocket and handing it to him. It was the certificate of Dr. Comeit Strong, countersigned by Mr. Sylam, with an authorization at the foot from Mr. Ruby Blood, of Rostock House, Kensington, to the four keepers, to arrest and conduct to the asylum Horace St. John Warner, a person not of sound mind.

The Giant cast his eyes over it, and muttered—

"I'm no scholar, but it looks ship-shape."

And he handed it over to Warner, who could **not** take it because his hands were confined.

"My eyes!" exclaimed the Giant, "that's making it a little too hot," and taking a knife out of his pocket he made as if he were going to cut the string. One of the keepers interposed to prevent this, laying his hand on the Giant's arm. The Birmingham turned upon him, and with his left hand gave him a terrific blow upon the wrist, which nearly dislocated it. The man howled and writhed with pain.

"Hands off," cried the Giant; "don't you come that game again, young man, if *you* please. Now, sir, just ease your elbows a bit. That's it."

A slash with the knife soon severed the cord, and Warner was free. He took the paper, and read it.

"I'm pleased to see that," remarked the Giant. "That's something like."

"It is formal, and all that," said Warner, after he had completed its perusal; "but it is the result of an infamous conspiracy. I know all about it. But these rascals might have locked me up, and no one would have known what had become of me, had I not seen you, and had the good fortune to attract your attention. Now I don't care so much, because my wife will know where I am going, and will be able to take measures to rescue me."

The Giant began to count on his fingers—

"One, two, three, four," he said.

"What is it?" demanded Warner.

"Only four of 'em, sir. Shall I do it?"

"Do what?"

"Just give 'em a little bit of my mind—a touch of the P.R. It wont hurt 'em."

"I don't know that we should gain anything by it," replied Warner. "I know you could do it easy; but I would rather you accompanied me to Rostock House, and see the man who calls himself Blood, and who is the proprietor."

"Right you are, sir," exclaimed the Giant.
"Now, Pompey, make room there."

This command was addressed to a keeper sitting on the same side of the cab as Warner; but the man did not seem to take the request in good part, for he replied—

"We don't want no pumpkins as has run to seed in here."

"Don't want no pumpkins, eh?" repeated the Giant. "Well, I was never called 'pumpkins' afore. Pumpkins, eh! Your mother's proud of you, aint she? Grinds her knives on you, and that's 'cos you's sharp. I must have a better look at you, Pompey. Come out."

Extending one of his huge fists, he seized the man by the collar of his coat, and dragging him out of the cab, he held him bodily in the air, and looked at him as one might at a cat or a dog.

"Aint up to much," he muttered, as the result of his inspection; and he let him fall down in the gutter. Getting into the vehicle, he sat down by Warner, saying—"Excuse the liberty, sir." Then he added to the cabman—"Now then, old Fiddlesticks, wake up." He shut the door, and the

keeper, picking himself up from the gutter, exclaimed—

“This is a fine go, this is! I’m to walk, I suppose.”

“Hang on with your eyelids behind,” replied the Giant. “If such is not agreeable to your taste, ‘busses is cheap and knifeboards handy.”

The cab now began to go on again. The man slunk behind, and made the best of a bad bargain. The other keepers, awed by the recent display of the Giant’s prodigious strength, forbore to take up the quarrel. They were strong and powerful men themselves, but the Birmingham phenomenon could have beaten them all together.

The Giant did not feel at all comfortable in a cab. It was not big enough for him. He was sadly circumscribed, and obliged to bend his head.

“Pity you can’t take the roof off,” he remarked.

Warner took advantage of the opportunity, and talked earnestly to his friend in a low tone. The keepers would have prevented this clandestine correspondence had they had their own way, but the Giant was their master, and they knew it. Warner modulated his voice, so that what he said should not be listened to and reported by those who were soon to be his gaolers. The substance of what he said was this. He would willingly avail himself of any chance to escape; but if he could get away from the keepers at that moment, the chances were that they would pounce upon him again at some future time, not far distant, when he would run a

risk of being sent to some barbarous place in the country, or in the wildest part of the Highlands of Scotland, where nobody could communicate with him, and where he would languish till the end of his days, when death stepped in to release him from his odious captivity. He felt sure that he had unscrupulous and daring enemies to contend with, and the best way would be to submit, for the present, and make the fact of his sanity plain to every one who had an interest in entertaining it.

"If I should not be able to do this," he concluded, "you must make an attempt to rescue me, which you can easily do. Very likely, when the mad doctor sees me, and converses with me, he will admit at once that I have been certificated about unfairly."

The Giant did not appear so much enamoured of a temporizing policy as his master. He would have preferred making a dash, and extricating Warner from his thraldom. But as he was told not to do so, he bowed his head, and submitted to what he refused to look upon as superior wisdom, but which, coming from the quarter it did, was law to him. He was not fertile in ideas. His brain was not like virgin soil—well dressed, prolific in suggestions, schemes, and plots; but he could act if any one would think for him and tell him what to do.

On arriving at Rostock House, the Giant got out first, subsequently giving his arm to Warner. The keepers followed, and kept an eye upon their prisoner. They were afraid that he would attempt to escape. The Giant perceived that the keeper he

had turned out of the cab had hung on behind, as errand-boys do. He exclaimed, in a low voice—

“Bravo, Rous! that’s your sort. Hope you sat comfortable.”

The man scowled, but made no reply; but the convulsive twitching of his mouth and the nervous compression of his hands showed distinctly enough what he would have done had he not been afraid of the consequences. The Birmingham Giant would not be parted from Warner until he had heard the verdict of the proprietor of the asylum. So he accompanied him into the presence of the man into whose hands the destinies of many poor creatures were confided by the heartlessness and inhumanity of their friends, who were in most cases instigated by their cupidity, and not from a compassionate motive, or wish to alleviate the sufferings of their afflicted relatives.

Mr. Ruby Blood was not a pleasant man to look at. In stature he was small, in body stout. His face gave you the impression that he drank, for his nose was rubicund and inflamed. The Giant remarked this peculiarity directly he entered the room, and as Mr. Blood motioned himself and Warner to seats, he looked fixedly at the wall, and apostrophizing a small fly, exclaimed, “Don’t you do it.”

This he repeated three or four times. Ruby Blood directed an inquiring glance towards him, which the Giant interpreted, and said—

“It’s only a fly, master. I’m giving him a bit of advice. He seems inclined to settle on your nose; and I say, ‘Don’t you do it,’ ‘cos I’m main certain

sure that he'll burn his little legs and singe his little wings if he does."

The Giant delivered this with great gravity, without laughing or moving a muscle of his countenance. The mad doctor frowned, and said—

" You have accompanied your friend here. Do you wish to make any remark? If not, you can retire."

" Let the guv'nor speak up for himself," replied the Giant.

Warner exclaimed—" I suppose you fancy that because I have been brought here, it follows that I must be mad?"

" There are certainly some grounds for the supposition."

" I don't think so. However, we wont argue the point. I beg to state most distinctly, that I am no more mad than you are."

" Of course not. That is what everybody says. They all declare I am the only demented person in the place," replied the mad doctor.

" It does not matter what other people think or say," exclaimed Warner, impatiently. " You sent a couple of incompetent, ignorant fools to examine me. They both got drunk, and I kicked them out of the place."

" Yes; have you anything else to say, because my time is valuable?"

" Isn't that enough?"

" You can forward any complaints you like to the proper quarter," said the doctor, soothingly.

" Complaints be d——," said Warner.

"Come, come, I shall have to put you under restraint if you are violent."

"Will you, though? I merely came here to satisfy you that I am as sane as yourself."

"Of course," replied the doctor, with a provoking smile.

"What do you see about me to justify an opinion of my being *non compos*?" said Warner. "Do I look it? Do I act as if I were out of my senses? You must be the most unprincipled scoundrel under the sun if you venture to say such a thing. You deserve to be exposed and shown up. I have a great mind to do it."

"When you go away from here, you are perfectly at liberty to do as you please."

"When! That won't be long first, for I am going now."

"I think not; excuse me if I contradict you," replied Mr. Ruby Blood, blandly, advancing to the bell-rope. It chanced, however, that he had to pass by the Giant, who, on receiving a permissive nod from Warner, rose to his feet and placed his back against the bell.

"Not if I know it!" he exclaimed.

The mad doctor looked at the gigantic frame of the Birmingham man, and thought discretion was the better part of valour.

"How many men does it require to take you to the station-house?" he said.

"I never tried," replied the Giant; "upwards of a score I should think."

"Oh! I want to know, because I'll send for them."

"Bowl him over!" exclaimed Warner. The Giant rubbed his huge palms together, then clenched his fists and gave the doctor a blow that sent him rolling against a cheffonier, one of the panels of which he broke in, with such force did he come in contact with it. In falling the doctor gave utterance to a loud cry, which echoed through the room. The four keepers who had brought Warner to the asylum rushed in. They were evidently in waiting. Perhaps they anticipated a scuffle. On seeing them, Warner armed himself with the poker. The four men directed their attention principally to their prisoner, leaving the Giant unmolested, but he shifted his position when he saw their design, and stood before his master. One burly fellow, bolder than the rest, approached a little too near the sweep of the Giant's arm, but the next instant he fell with an impetus into the arms of his companions. After this they conferred together for a minute, and the result of their conference seemed to be a determination to advance against the enemy in concert. He was prepared for them, and the slaughter that ensued was like that of the Philistines by Samson. First one man rolled over and over on the softly carpeted floor, then another rolled up against the wall with a shock almost sufficient to cause concussion of the brain; a third would fall like an ox and make everything in the room shake. They were of the bulldog breed though, and did not throw up the sponge without a tussle; as the Giant mentally observed, they could stand some tanning. They kept on coming to time after

every serious defeat, and the Giant thought it would be advisable to clear the room of them, so after every knockdown blow he advanced a step or two nearer the door, which stood open. This narrowed the arena. The keepers endeavoured in vain to stem the tide and widen the distance, and owing to this encroachment they lost the assistance of one of their body. He was knocked head over heels against the door ; his head came in contact with the woodwork and he fell insensible upon the threshold. This was a serious loss. The Giant laughed triumphantly and pushed them more than ever. At last he drove them out of the room like a flock of sheep, and then he turned round to look for Warner and see how he had fared during the contest which had just been raging so furiously. It had not struck him as singular before that Warner had not in any way assisted him or shown himself during the conflict, but now the reason was apparent. He was not in the room. Warner had vanished, leaving no sign behind him to account for his mysterious disappearance. The mad doctor was also nowhere to be seen. The Giant rubbed his eyes, thinking he must in some way be mistaken. The room was empty. It was clear that the doctor had recovered himself, and while the Giant's attention was absorbed, had taken advantage of the opportunity. Probably he had whisked Warner off through a private door. They were both gone.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A FIGHT WITH MANIACS.

THE Birmingham Giant was still puzzling his brain to think what would be the best course for him to pursue under these embarrassing circumstances. The mad doctor must have surprised Warner by attacking him from behind, and having secured him, either by rendering him insensible or by some means equally efficacious, he had made his exit from the room with him at a cunningly contrived door which was not apparent to the observer and only to be discovered by close scrutiny. This was the Giant's theory, and it was far from being an erroneous one. He was about to examine the walls with a view of finding out the door and forcing his way after his master, when he heard a noise behind him which resembled the clank of rusty armour. Turning sharply round as if he had been a soldier performing that elaborate movement called right-about-face, he found himself confronted with an individual of singular appearance. He was tall and thin; lantern-jawed may be an expressive term, but here it does not suffice to describe the attenuation of the man who had intruded upon the meditations of the Giant. Upon his head he wore an old tin saucepan instead of a hat, a door-mat was suspended by a string from his neck, and was

intended to perform the part of a breastplate ; he was similarly protected behind. A couple of tea-trays bent and fastened in a peculiar fashion protected his legs ; his hand grasped a broomstick which he poised like a lance. The tea-trays were the jangling things which had caused the Giant to pirouette. Seeing that he was evidently not understood or appreciated at his real value, the lunatic made an elaborate bow. The Giant returned it, although he was not in the humour for any tomfoolery. He could see that the keepers had evidently turned the madman loose in order either to retard his movements or because they relied upon his annoying him in some way.

" You, sir," said the lunatic, " are, I am informed, the redoubtable knight for whose head all Christendom is clamouring. I am, as you may have surmised, he of La Mancha, whom men call Don Quixote."

" Oh !" ejaculated the Giant ; " how's Sancho ?"

" I regret that I am unable to answer your question with a degree of precision ; he is at present in Barataria, and I hope governing with the wisdom of Solomon and the moderation of Solon."

" Thank you," said the Giant ; " that'll do ; you can go now. Good morning."

" Certainly not," replied the madman. " I have sworn that I will have your head, and the oath of a knight is sacred. I hereby throw down my gage ; we'll fight with spear or battle-axe, or with the bright Toledo."

" I'll punch your stupid old head," remarked the

Giant, giving him a blow on the breastplate, otherwise door-mat. With remarkable agility the lunatic stepped back and began to flourish his broomstick with great vigour. The Giant was about to take hold of him by the shoulders and drop him out of the window, when four howling maniacs ran into the room. They were unarmed. The keepers had liberated the most ferocious of their prisoners, in order that they might inflict a castigation upon the Giant ; but they dared not go to the length of arming them, for fear something might happen which would necessitate a coroner's inquest. Besides, it would have been a difficult thing to have deprived them of their weapons again when they wished to replace them in the dungeons. The maniacs were all nearly naked. One had just been let out of a strait-waistcoat. The mad fit with which he was troubled occasionally was upon him, and he was not safe. A second had been a minute before unstrapped from a bed upon which he was confined when the evil spirit with which he was possessed became more than usually turbulent. Straws were sticking about the hair of a third, who was chained up like a wild beast upon a heap of straw. He fancied himself a cannibal, and his propensity was to eat people ; he would make a dead set at a keeper's legs, and make his teeth meet in the fleshy part, sometimes biting out a large piece.

The Giant grew slightly alarmed when he saw this mad crew whooping and yelling a few paces from him. He was afraid that the keepers would

coalesce with them, and then the odds would be too much for him. They, however, were too careful of themselves. They knew very well that the maniacs would turn upon them in a moment ; so they contented themselves with standing in the doorway to watch the encounter. The one who had been rendered insensible by one of the Giant's blows had recovered himself, and was sitting up with his back against the wall—still a little confused, but sufficiently conscious to understand what was going on. The men were fully alive to the fact that the maniacs would probably get roughly handled, but that they did not care for ; they thought it would do them good, and so they looked on with callous stolidity.

The first act of the maniacs was to knock down poor Don Quixote and trample upon him. Then they made an assault upon the Giant. The keepers drew Don Quixote on one side : he was a harmless old fellow, and they sometimes allowed him to wander about the corridors. No one disliked him. He fell to rubbing his arms and legs, and put on a rueful countenance. The lunatics met with a warm reception from the Giant, who rolled them over one after the other like nine-pins ; but they renewed the attack with blind fury directly they could find their feet, foaming at the mouth, grating their teeth horribly, uttering wild, inhuman cries. They assailed again and again. Suddenly the Giant uttered an exclamation of pain. A loud laugh from the keepers greeted his ears. Looking down, he perceived the cannibal busily engaged

in making his fangs meet in the calf of his left leg. Raising his right he dealt him a terrible kick in the face, which cut the flesh to the bone, and caused him to relinquish his hold. Another broke all his front teeth, and the miserable wretch lay on the floor cursing and raving. The other three lunatics were enraged beyond measure at the catastrophe which had happened to their companion, and they pressed the Giant with determined bravery. Had it been any one else they had had to deal with they would most assuredly have murdered him. Their ferocity was awful to contemplate. Their distorted countenances, battered and disfigured by their herculean adversary's blows, the top of whose colossal form they could scarcely reach in their most frantic endeavours, and stained with blood and swollen in various places, were suggestive of mutinous fiends in the infernal regions. The Giant was so hotly driven that he fell back a step or two, thinking that a gradual retreat towards the wall would be not only prudent, but strongly advisable under the circumstances. The lunatics screamed and screeched and made all sorts of unearthly noises such as you would expect to come from the depths of an African forest in the dead of night. They fought tooth and nail, and although some of the Giant's blows stunned them completely for a few seconds, they were at him again as soon as they could recover their breath. An indomitable spirit seemed to possess them. Nothing sufficed to subdue them. They had sunk to the level of brutes, and their pugnacious instincts were alive within them. At

last the Giant touched the wall with his back, and pressed rather heavily against it. Suddenly he felt the door, as it were, give way. He accommodated himself to this gliding motion, and it instantly occurred to him that he had come unexpectedly and accidentally in contact with the secret door through which the doctor had made his escape with Warner a short time before. He resolved to take advantage of the opportunity with the end in view of escaping from the maniacs, who were becoming decidedly troublesome. Strong as the Giant undoubtedly was, he had to contend with three infuriated wretches, who fought with a desperation somewhat resembling that of Eastern fanatics. The one who had lost his teeth still lay upon the floor, and raved and cursed in the most blasphemous manner at finding himself deprived of the dental weapons he had chiefly relied upon. Making a sudden spring backwards, the Giant passed through the door, which he immediately shut in the faces of his antagonists. The sharp click of a lock was heard, as its component parts fitted into one another. A short pause ensued, during which the Giant was able to breathe. He could hear the shouts and execrations of those who would have been his pursuers had their weak intellects and disordered brains still preserved the faculty of reasoning ; but the unhappy creatures could only recognise the fact of the disappearance of their enemy : how he had gone, or where he had gone to, was another thing. The heavy clanking of chains and the sharp crack of the thong of a dog-whip was now audible. It

showed that the keepers were driving the maniacs back to their cells, as drovers would drive so many cattle. Oaths and exclamations rent the air, but the sounds grew gradually more and more indistinct, until a profound silence usurped the place of the demoniac ravings of the madmen and the harsh and brutal objurgations of the callous keepers. The Giant seriously thought over his position. He found himself in a passage which was in total darkness. He could tell that it was a passage and not a room, from the simple circumstance of his being able to touch the walls on either side by the mere effort of stretching out his arms. Warner must have been conducted along this corridor by the mad doctor, and the Giant had the strongest inclination to follow the length of the passage until it again brought him into an inhabited part of the house. He did not allow himself much time for deliberation. He anticipated some fresh attack on the part of the keepers, who he felt sure were not idle, but most probably organizing some new device whcrewith to surprise and take him unawares. He advanced with great caution, feeling his way as he went, but he had not gone more than half-a-dozen yards before he missed his footing, owing to a sudden declension in the ground. He would have been precipitated headlong down a declivity, the nature of which he could not at present divine, had he not caught hold of a projecting something which saved him from the imminent destruction with which he was threatened a moment ago. He discovered by examination that he had reached the head of a staircase, and the wood that he was cling-

ing to formed a portion of the banisters. He had no choice but to go on. To retreat and again enter the room in which the battle with the maniacs had been fought was not to his mind, and he reflected that it was a thing he could do at any time, if the necessity for so retrograde a movement should become paramount. One by one he descended the steps until about fifteen in all had been traversed. This brought him to the bottom. He could tell, from the chill which struck upon him, that he was in the basement or lower part of the house, and the hardness of the substance upon which he was treading indicated that the floor was paved with flags; whether he was in a room or a passage, he could not at first discover, but having recourse to his former plan of groping about in the darkness, which was here quite as profound as it had been upstairs, he found that he had entered another long passage, which differed from the first in this respect, it extended both right and left. It was a question now as to which way he should turn; acting upon an impulse for which he could assign no particular reason, he went to the left. As he proceeded, he either heard, or fancied that he heard, groans and wails coming from the solid walls. He paused, so that he might listen with more attention. After half a minute had elapsed, the noises again saluted his ears. They unmistakably proceeded from a human being! It at once occurred to the Giant that the cells of the madhouse were situated in the part to which he had penetrated. Perhaps the doctor, thinking Warner would be in safe keeping in these desolate catacombs, had conveyed him there,

hoping to avoid pursuit or rescue. Entombed alive, with whom could he communicate—with whom hold converse, or with whom make interest for his release? The Giant knocked upon what he took to be the door with his knuckles. A groan was the only response. Thinking that he had discovered the whereabouts of his master, who could not respond to him because he was gagged, the Giant resolved to exercise his vast strength in battering down the door. He examined its position well before he made the attempt; he found the keyhole and then found the centre of the door as well as he was able. Retreating to the wall of the passage, he drew himself together, and hurled his huge carcase violently against the woodwork. It trembled and cracked, but refused to give way. Another charge, and another, in quick succession, were more successful—with a crash, the door parted from its hinges and dashed against the wall of a narrow cell. A timid shriek greeted the entry of the Giant; it was evidently the cry of a woman. Much disappointed at not having hit upon the exact locality in which Warner was concealed, the Giant was about to retreat, feeling that he could not afford to waste his sympathy upon the captive, however miserable and deserving of it she might be, when something embraced one of his knees. Bending down, his hand came in contact with a huge mass of tangled hair; at the same moment a voice harsh as a raven's from dampness and exposure to a humid atmosphere, exclaimed—

“For the love of Heaven take me away from here!”

"Who are you?" asked the Giant, touched by the pleading accent and the despairing tone of voice in which the woman spoke.

"I am a wife," was the reply, "and I was a mother, but my child died in my arms in this place. Its little bones are now lying in a mouldy heap in that corner."

The Giant, thinking such a recital too horrible for credence, imagined that he had come across a veritable madwoman, and felt desirous of making good his escape from so dangerous a vicinity. He blamed himself for his folly in listening to her in the first instance; but the fact was, he had for the moment forgotten that he was in a mad house, and thought he was talking to a person of sound mind.

"Nonsense," he said; "you are mad. Leave go my leg."

"No, no, I will not, until you promise to take me with you. You cannot be a keeper, or you would not have broken down the door. I am not mad. I am kept here because my husband wishes me dead, and thinks that the treatment I am subjected to will kill me. But I will not die. I always thought that Providence would give me a chance of confounding my enemies; and this hope and expectation is the only thing that has kept me up and supported me through three long weary years of indescribable wretchedness and misery."

If the woman was mad, she did not talk in an insane way, so the Giant came to the conclusion that it would be better to allow her to follow him. The barrier which had hitherto confined her being

broken down, he did not see how he could prevent her attaching herself to him if she chose.

"Do you know your way out of this passage?" he said.

"Yes," she replied, "I remember every turning. I have during my confinement been taken up and down stairs more than once, and my eyes are so accustomed to the darkness that I can find my way like a cat."

"Did you hear some one being brought down half an hour or so ago?"

"I did. They passed by me. If you are looking for a friend, you will find him higher up in one of the last of this row of cells."

"Come along, then," said the Giant, delighted at the prospect of soon finding Warner and restoring him to liberty. The woman followed him as he walked excitedly along the passage, keeping close to him as if she were afraid of losing one whom she already began to look upon as her saviour from the Stygian gloom of the detestable vaults in which she had been so long and so inhumanly incarcerated. After going some distance the Giant exclaimed in a loud voice—

"Mr. Warner, sir."

The words reverberated through the cavernous recesses with a discordant echo. Directly they had subsided the Giant, who was straining every nerve to catch the faintest sound in reply, heard a tremulous voice almost at his elbow say, "Here!" This was followed by a half-choked sob.

"This is the door. He is in there," exclaimed the woman. "I know all the voices of the poor

creatures confined in these cells, and his is a strange one. I hear them often in the night-time, singing hymns perhaps, or praying. Sometimes when they find that is no good and Heaven vouchsafes them no reply, they curse, and small blame to them ; yet I do not know that I ought to say that, but captivity hardens the heart."

The Giant did not stop to listen to these remarks. It was enough for him that he had discovered the identical cell in which, in all likelihood, Warner was shut up. He went close to the door and exclaimed—"Mind yourself, sir ; I am going to smash a bit of timber." He retreated to the wall as he had done in the first instance, and pursuing a precisely similar mode of treatment, he had the satisfaction of hearing the door fly back as it was forcibly wrenched from its fastenings. The next moment he was holding Warner in his arms. The young man appeared to be quite prostrated. He clung round the bulky form of the Giant in a thoroughly childish manner, and sobbed and cried as if his heart was broken.

"Come, sir, stop the pump, or else the well 'll run dry," said the Giant, soothingly. "You've no call to take on. I've given 'em pepper upstairs ; made the place too hot to hold them."

For some minutes Warner's exhausted nature would not allow him to speak. When he could, he said, in a shaky voice, totally different from his usual way of speaking, "Thank God you have come ; I should have gone raving mad in another hour. You cannot conceive the awful feeling that came over me on being stowed in here. I thought

you had been kicked out, or at all events that you would not be able to find me, and that I should die in this hole. I dare say I am a great fool, but it is all horrible beyond anything I have ever dreamt of. The cold slimy walls, the narrow cell, without any light or a single article of furniture, the groans and exclamations of the poor beggars shut up on each side of me—”

“Excuse me, sir, but if all that'll keep, why, it wont hurt. You see we've got a little bit more pastime before us. We're bound to get out of this cuckoo's-nest, and we've got our work before us, or I'm mistaken.”

Finding himself with a friend again cheered Warner's drooping spirits, and he saw how necessary it was to do something by which they could effect their escape. In order to understand the state of affairs more clearly he put a few hurried questions to the Giant, who informed him of the manner in which he had fought the keeper and then the maniacs, after which he had discovered the door which led him to the vaults in which Warner had been confined. It proved that the Giant's surmise as to the way in which Warner had been spirited away was correct. The doctor had crept behind him and carried him off, without the notice of the Giant being attracted or his suspicions aroused. By accident Warner came in contact with the woman the Giant had first of all liberated. He was so nervous that he fancied he knew not what. “Oh, Christ!” he cried, “what is that?” This necessitated a fresh explanation, which Warner having heard, he made no opposition

to her making one of the party ; he told her he was afraid they would have much to encounter before they were free and outside the walls of the asylum, but he promised that everything that could be done for her should be.

As she had said she was so well acquainted with the premises, the Giant asked her what, in her opinion, would be the best way to extricate themselves from the trap in which they found themselves. She replied that she believed a door at the extremity of the passage, on the left-hand side, led up some steps into the garden attached to the asylum. It was strongly barred and securely locked, but, she added, if the Giant were strong enough to break down one door he could break down another. The Giant was astonished to hear her talk so sensibly, and he felt sure that she, like his master, was the victim of some foul conspiracy. He congratulated himself upon having been the means of rescuing her from her intolerable imprisonment. Warner agreed with the advice of their new friend. He said that he thought the chances were ten to one that the drawing-room in which the conflict had taken place, and in which the secret door was situated, would be strongly garrisoned. They would expect the Giant to return unsuccessfully in a short time, and they would endeavour, by the force of overwhelming numbers to avenge the defeat he had inflicted upon them. He concluded by urging the Giant to try his strength upon the door which was supposed to lead into the garden. The entire length of the passage had to be traversed, as they were now on the right-

hand side. The Giant allowed the woman to lead the way. He followed her, to prevent any sudden or covert attack from a concealed enemy. Warner brought up the rear. Every now and then his breast would heave convulsively, and he would gasp with a sort of hysterical sob. He had been so terrified that he could not all at once recover his wonted manner. The door was reached, and the Giant found that it was securely fastened, as he had been told, but to his great satisfaction it opened outwards, so that his attacks upon its ponderous surface would have more effect than if it had been differently constructed. He lost no time in commencing the siege. Like a huge catapult, sledge-hammer, or battering-ram he put himself in position, and launched himself at the obstacle impeding his progress. To his infinite surprise he went with a crash right through the door, which snapped and fell all to pieces as if it had been so much tinder. Picking himself up and staring strangely, for the unaccustomed daylight dazzled his eyes, he saw that the door was so old and rotten, that one-half the strength he had expended would have sufficed to drive it from its hinges. The locks, bolts, and bars were rusty and time-worn, and yielded easily to the least pressure. The mad doctors had evidently never contemplated an attack in such a quarter, or they would have taken greater precautions. The Giant was a good deal bruised, and he sat down on the steps to examine himself, but as he did so a sound smote upon his ear which caused him to listen attentively.

CHAPTER XXV.

▲ STRANGE DISCOVERY.

THE situation of affairs at this moment may be briefly described in the following manner. The Giant was sitting upon the flight of stone steps which led up a sort of area to the garden, some eight or ten feet above. Warner was standing by the side of the captive who had been so happily released by the Giant. With an instinctive feeling of delicacy she had shrunk within the shelter of the passage, for she was semi-nude. Immediately Warner perceived this he took off his coat, and, without a word, dropped it gently over her shoulders. She thanked him with a look ineffably sweet and grateful. All at once the Giant, in a warning voice, bade them remain perfectly motionless. They did so, scarcely allowing themselves to breathe. A footstep was heard approaching. It drew nearer, until it reached the top of the flight of steps. A neighbouring clock struck the hour of six. The man stopped to listen and count the strokes. The Giant, taking advantage of this pre-occupation, leaped lightly up the few intervening steps and caught the intruder by the collar of his coat, holding it so tightly as to nearly strangle him. Dragging him down the steps, so as to be free from observation, he threatened him with instant annihi-

lation if he uttered the least sound, except in replying to questions he might put to him. The man made no resistance. He had been completely taken by surprise. He said he was a gardener and night-watcher. His duties commenced at six in the evening. Hearing the noise made by the falling door, he had come up to investigate the cause of it. He had been engaged in a tool-house, having just relieved the day gardener and watcher when he heard the sound. The Giant demanded his key, as he thought it would be better to open the garden-door quietly than to smash it to pieces and arouse the attention of any people who might be passing by outside. The man gave it him without a word. The garden was well wooded and filled with shrubs. Making use of these to conceal himself, the Giant crept from one to another, dragging the gardener with him for greater security, followed closely by Warner and the unfortunate lady, whose heart palpitated audibly. It was a hazardous juncture, and all felt it to be so. The garden reached, the Giant relinquished his hold of the gardener for a moment to put the key in the lock. Availing himself of the chance thus unexpectedly offered him, the man slipped like an eel past Warner, and, running as fast as he could towards the Asylum, called out "Help! help! Rescue! help!" as loud as his lungs would allow him. The Giant in no measured language blamed himself for not being more careful, but as he had the key in his hand he did not trouble himself much about the matter. The key was fairly in the lock, and he

endeavoured to turn it, but, to his astonishment, it would not move. Beads of perspiration stood upon his brow, and, with an exclamation of despair, he said to Warner, "The wrong key! He's choused me!"

"Break it down," replied Warner, greatly excited, and trembling with apprehension lest a recapture should be attempted.

Hearing footsteps, the Giant turned round and saw that six or seven men, he could not accurately count them in the hurry of the moment, had issued from the house and were in full pursuit. He redoubled his efforts. All that he could succeed in doing was to send a panel at the bottom flying into the street.

"Quick!" he exclaimed to Warner. "This is better than nothing. I'll keep the fellows off."

Warner did not require to be told twice. He seized the lady by the arm, hurried her to the door, and told her to pass through the aperture. She refused, entreating him to go first. Seeing that an altercation would lessen their chance, he put an end to this generous rivalry by doing as she requested, almost directly afterwards pulling her through after him. Warner hesitated a moment when he found himself in the street. He was without his hat and coat, while the rest of his clothes were a good deal soiled. His companion was scarcely decent enough for a common street beggar. His first impulse was to look for a cab, but he thought he ought to wait for the Giant, and if need be assist him in some way. The Giant himself relieved him from

this difficulty ; his voice came loud and sonorous over the wall—

“Home ! A cab ! I’m all right.”

On hearing this, Warner, with his companion, walked quickly along the street, which was an out of the way one, not much frequented, until he saw a cab. It had just put somebody down, and the driver was very glad to meet with another fare. A few people had followed Warner with looks of curiosity, and the cabman regarded them suspiciously, until he felt a sovereign slipped into his hand, and then he was alacrity itself. Warner told the man to drive to his own house ; he was trembling violently. The lady was so overcome that she was incapable of speech. The Giant, in the meanwhile, was performing prodigies of valour. Covering the retreat of the fugitives, he stepped gradually back as he saw his foes approaching. They were running at full speed, so that had he not opposed his body and his brawny arms full of strength and vigour, not one would have got away. By keeping the enemy off he gained time for Warner. Ruby Blood headed his keepers, hounding them on with liberal promises and fierce exhortations. In all they were eight—six keepers, the gardener, and the mad doctor. Dr. Comeit Strong and Mr. Sylam were not present. Probably they were absent on professional business. Mr. Blood, who had had some experience of the wonderful power of the Giant, hung back, forming what may be called the rearguard, which was principally composed of himself, the gardener, and the four keepers who had been so knocked

about in the drawing-room in the early part of the afternoon. The other two had never before encountered a son of Anak, whose strength was only equalled by his science in and thorough knowledge of the fistic art ; and they led the van. The Giant's plan of action was instantly made. His first care was to prevent any pursuit, so he guarded the loop-hole he had made in the door with the vigilance and care of a legendary griffin—all beak and claws. If he found himself hotly pressed, which was more than likely, he intended to work gradually round the garden, keeping his assailants at a safe distance, until he could enter the house and leave it by the regular entrance. The two keepers I have mentioned, wishing to distinguish themselves and to earn the goodwill of their employer, rushed like two bulls at the Giant. He shook his head, and received them smiling. The foremost one touched the earth with a resonant concussion. The second received a blow on the head which sounded like the explosion of a piece of detonating powder. This delicate attention on the part of the Giant prevented his coming to time any more. The man's skull was fractured. The mad doctor foamed at the mouth with rage, like one of the lunatics under his parental and benevolent management ; and pulling out a handful of sovereigns offered them to any one who would overthrow the Giant. But unhappily for him, no David could be found to war against the Philistine. At length, by dint of coaxing and promising, the four keepers, with the gardener, agrced to make a simultaneous attack. One was to makc a charge behind, one on each side, while

the other two were to make a diversion in front. The gad-flies had made up their minds to sting the bull this time. Placing his back against the door, the Giant precluded the possibility of his being taken by surprise in that quarter; so that he could only be assaulted in flank and in front. The keepers advanced in a body. The Giant prepared for the sally; and soon a general engagement took place, which was fierce and bloody while it lasted. The Giant received several of those blows which are called rib roasters. He was too tall and too skilful to admit of his face being reached, but the pygmies with whom he had been contending managed to touch him here and there. Their efforts did no particular damage, whereas every time the Giant struck one of them, it rolled him over like a shot. They were undoubtedly strong men for their size and build, but they could not stand this continually, and one by one they dropped off, lying exhausted and prostrate upon the grassplot, in some cases bleeding from their eyes and ears. In half an hour only Mr. Ruby Blood remained intact. His men were either really disabled, or they were simulating great distress in order to escape any more of the Giant's punishment, which in time would have killed the wiriest of them. Perfectly satisfied, from the lapse of time, that Warner must be in safety, the Giant, glancing contemptuously upon his prostrate foes, walked up to the mad doctor, with huge seven-league-boots strides, and seizing him by the arm, told him to walk along quickly, or he would find a way of quickening his movements. The doctor, seeing there

was no help for it, sullenly submitted. There happened to be a sort of small pond in the garden, which was devoted to the manufacture of liquid manure. This the Giant had noticed in his passage from the vaults, and towards this he dragged the doctor. Holding him over the filthy basin, he poised him carefully—

“It is my turn now, I think,” he exclaimed.
‘Let’s see how you like it.’

The mad doctor dropped with a splash into the pond, and disappeared from sight. In a moment or two he reappeared, spluttering and spitting as if he had imbibed something not at all to his taste. Then the Giant left him up to his waist in what was not sufficiently odorous to be called an agreeable perfume; the doctor by his manner plainly indicated that he was perfectly aware that he had not been immersed in rose-water or eau-de-Cologne. The Giant now made his way unmolested to a side door, which stood open and gave admittance to the house. He entered the drawing-room, passed through it, and debouched upon the entrance hall. Here he met a female with a dustpan in her hand, which gave fair grounds for the inference that she was the housemaid. She looked timidly at the Giant’s immense figure, but he good-humouredly chuckled her under the chin, and said—

“Show me the way out, my little dear, will you?”

“Haven’t you grow’d lately, sir?” she replied.

“Ah! you are too saucy for me, I can see,” said the Giant, helping himself to a kiss, which was a mean action he ought to have been ashamed of,

seeing how helpless she was in his hands. But the housemaid did not seem to object to it at all, for she merely observed that it was the first time in her life she had been kissed by a little man.

When the Giant reached the outside of the lunatic asylum, he shook his fist at it.

Hailing a hansom, he drove at once to Warner's house. He found him anxiously awaiting him. The lady had gone upstairs with Agnes, to whose good offices Warner had confided her. Agnes was not alarmed at her husband's absence, because it had not as yet been of any serious duration, but when she heard his story, and that of the poor creature he brought with him, she was transported with indignation. She had no doubt whatever that Milani, with his usual villainous cunning, had been the principal actor in the disgraceful plot. Warner shook the Giant warmly by the hand, and asked him anxiously if he were hurt.

"I'm none so dusty, sir, thank you," replied the Giant, who gave his patron a statement of what had occurred after his escape through the broken panel of the door.

"By Jove! you're a glorious fellow!" replied Warner, enthusiastically; "I shall never be able to do enough for you in return for this day's work."

Presently Agnes returned; the Giant bowed, and was about to retire to the lower regions, when Warner exclaimed,—

"Stop where you are, Birmingham; you're one of the family now."

The Giant made an elaborate bow.

"I have made the strangest discovery," said Agnes, "that you ever heard of."

"What is it?" asked Warner.

"Who do you think our new friend is? You will never guess. She is Milani's wife!"

"Nonsense!" ejaculated Warner.

"His wife!" repeated Agnes; "he married her when he first came to England. After he got on in the world she was not good enough for him, so he had her shut up in the asylum."

After some further conversation, Agnes ran up stairs again to Mrs. Milani. Warner amused himself by talking to the Birmingham, and making him relate his exploits over and over again. He was never tired of hearing how he knocked all the keepers out of time, and how he had finally ducked the mad doctor in his own muck pond. It pleased him beyond measure. After a time Agnes entered the room with Mrs. Milani. Soap and water, and the art of the milliner, had worked a great transformation in her. She was very thin and pale, and she had a way of blinking her eyes, because the light hurt them. Dressed in good taste, she looked lady-like and attractive. Every now and then the tears rose to her eyes, and occasionally she would start convulsively. The poor thing thought that some one was going to take her back to the asylum. Agnes was kindness itself to her; and Warner and the Birmingham Giant talked to her and endeavoured to reassure her in every way. She smiled faintly at their remarks, and looked at Agnes, who was her great friend.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE THREAD IS CUT.

MRS. MILANI'S constitution was found to be so shattered and debilitated that it was considered necessary by the physicians who were called in that she should be removed into the country for a few weeks, where, away from the noise and turmoil of a city, she might recover her health. Warner at once placed his country house at her service. The season was now over, or nearly so, and Agnes urged her husband to accompany Mrs. Milani and herself to Lerrick, the name of his place. He yielded to her solicitations, and the family, as he was fond of calling his little *ménage*, which included the Birmingham Giant, retired to Lerrick, which was delightfully situated in the midst of charming scenery and agreeable society, although the latter was to Agnes as if it did not exist. Agnes found Mrs. Milani's company quite sufficient for her. They were sitting in the garden at Lerrick, under a spreading cedar-tree, whose sable branches excluded the hot sun which scorched up the surrounding vegetation and made the air uncomfortably sultry. Three jets of water at a little distance fell with a merry tinkle into a marble basin in front of them, and they fancied the spray cooled the atmosphere. Breeze there was none, and a solemn stillness fell

around, as it does sometimes in the dreamy sunny summer weather, when the grasshoppers are too tired and full of lassitude to spin, and the gauzy flies repose upon a leaf until the solar heat shall have spent itself.

"Do you still love your husband?" asked Agnes.
"I put the question to you for a particular reason."

"I try to persuade myself sometimes that I do not," replied Mrs. Milani, "but my heart tells me I do; he is so clever and so great."

"Shall I endeavour to bring about a reconciliation?" said Agnes.

"Will you assist me? Oh! you will make my debt of gratitude to you so much greater than it is already."

"I will write to him, for I am acquainted with him, as I have told you, and ask him to come down here. He shall not be told why he is wanted, but seeing you shall be entirely a surprise. What do you say to that?"

Mrs. Milani pressed her friend's hand warmly, and thanked her for the suggestion she had just thrown out.

As they finished speaking, the voices of Warner and the Birmingham Giant were heard; they were making for the cedar-tree, but in another direction. They evidently did not see the two women, who hushed their breathing, so that they might take them unawares.

"Beginning to turn a hair or two, Birmingham?" exclaimed Warner.

"It takes it out of me a bit, sir; where shall I find the liquor?"

"On the ground—anywhere. Look out for the ice ; is it in the cup ? That's right ; take the wire off this bottle, while I open the soda. That will do. Now then, are you ready ? both pour together, or else it wont mix well."

The various liquors were duly commingled, and Warner tasted it with the air of a judge.

"Good brew, sir ?" asked his satellite.

"First chop," was the reply, with a slight smack of the lips ; "take a pull."

A rustling of muslin was heard, and Agnes exclaimed,—

"I don't see why I shouldn't have a pull !"

"Missus, sir !" said the Giant, with a smile.

Agnes communicated to him her conversation with Mrs. Milani, and the resolution they had come to.

Agnes wrote the letter, and it proved of magnetic power. Directly he received the epistle, Milani became the needle and flew towards the load-stone. He wrote back to say that he would arrive at the station at a certain hour. Agnes and Mrs. Milani, accompanied by Warner, drove over in an open carriage to meet the train. The carriage waited in the yard of the pretty country station ; it stood near some palings, over which the ladies had an excellent view of the interior and the line. The down trains stopped on the other side, so that all passengers had to cross the line to go out and enter the town. Warner got out of the carriage and walked across to the down platform, where he awaited the arrival of the train. Punctual to its

time it steamed into the station, deposited its freight, and rolled lazily off again to carry its good and evil tidings into other and remoter districts. Milani shook Warner by the hand, but there was a reservation in his manner. A few commonplace words were spoken, and they prepared to cross the line. When they were half-way across, Mrs. Milani, who had recognised her husband, could not control her feelings ; she burst into a fit of violent hysterics. Milani paused, and looked up. The sun streamed down upon him ; he shaded his eyes with his hand. It struck him that there was something familiar to him in that feminine wail. Warner also heard it, and ran on to render what assistance he could. Again and again Milani looked ; his brow clouded, his face darkened. There could be no doubt that the weeping and excited woman sitting in the carriage in the station yard was his wife ! The mad doctor had not told him of her escape, for the plainest reason, he would have lost his premium for her detention. Milani was thunderstruck—he remained rooted to the spot ; he could neither move one way nor the other. If Agnes had wished for revenge she could not have planned things in a more judicious manner ; the Italian was completely defeated. So absorbed was he, that he remained mutely gazing, standing between the metals of the up-line. Loud cries were uttered, but he heeded them not. There was a sound as of something mighty and irresistible, the thundering crank and the grinding steel ; the spectacle of his wife, sitting before him as free as air, fascinated him ;

there was a rush of wind--but it was too late--the monster was upon him ! An express train spares neither man nor woman, and the accomplished Milani was soon lying a mangled and mutilated mass some yards up the line. They hastily bore him to a waiting-room, and laid him, such as he was, with the semblance of humanity dashed out of him, upon the carpet. A surgeon was sent for, but it was a case beyond his skill to cure. A wild cry rent the air, and a woman fell on her knees by that heap of bloodstained flesh and bones. It was his wife ! He tried to shape his battered lips into a malignant smile, and then the thread was cut. The weird sisters severed another fate. Milani was no more ! When the fatal truth forces itself upon his wife--when she recognises the awful fact that he was taken from her for ever--the slender cord of her wavering reason snaps, and she is, what her husband in vain tried to make her, a raving lunatic. With an idiotic moan she sank by his side ; her mind was a wreck--her reason gone beyond a hope of revocation.

Mr. and Mrs. Warner experienced no more molestation. Lionel Cooper, after much consideration, consented to recognise Agnes. He considerately forgave her for outwitting him and being cleverer than himself, and began to regard her marriage with his stepson as rather a good thing than otherwise for the young gentleman in question, who was kept in order and under proper restraint by his stronger-minded matrimonial partner. And he once went so far after dinner, over a bottle of Sandemann's

vintage, as to say, "Well, my boy, you might have done worse."

This was a great concession ; but Mr. Lionel has since gone farther than that—he has accepted an invitation to stay at Lerrick in September, and go over the familiar stubble and see what sort of a bag he can make. "His hand is getting rather out, you know, but still he can bring his bird down."

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